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THE WOOING O'T

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THE WOOING O'T

A Novel

BY

MRS. ALEXANDER

AUTHOR OF

"WHICH SHALL IT BE?" "RALPH WILTON'S WEIRD," "HER DEAREST FOE," ETC.

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THE WOOING O'T.

CHAPTER I.

A COLD dull evening towards the end of February was slowly closing in—slowly, and with the indescribable melancholy which hangs round those lengthening evenings of early spring, when winter seems but more wintry from the cold prolonged light. A cynical east wind was sweeping the dust, and straws, and shavings, into little eddies, with bitter playfulness. The poor little crossing sweeper at the end of Edgeware Road, near the Marble Arch, had retired under the lee of a projecting front door near his beat, in company with a blind man and his shivering dog—all three evidently despairing of human aid. The lamps were gradually shining out, and in the chemist's shop near the corner of Beverly Street, a grimy little errand-boy was lighting the gas, which brought the big green and purple jars into favourable contrast to the outer gloom.

The chemist's shop occupied what had been the front parlour of the house in its palmy days, when Beverly Street had been the genteel residence of well-to-do professional families, and even boasted ready-furnished houses, which were not unfrequently tenanted by county M.P.'s during the session. Beverly Street had never been grand and aristocratic, but eminently genteel; and now, even in its decadence, no butchers' or greengrocers' shops defiled its gradual decline, neither did fishmongers pollute it. But occasional Berlin wool repositories, stationers, and circulating library establishments, and the chemist's above-mentioned, intruded themselves into the front parlours erst occupied by the refined wives and daughters of eminent barristers and physicians of courtly fame.

The shop in question had a certain air of antiquity, if dingy paint and dust, semi-effaced inscriptions on the inevitable hundred and fifty little drawers, and the half-empty look of the glass cases, which should have bristled with cosmétiques, pastilles, corn-eradicators, soothing syrups, tooth-brushes, and 'Bloom de Ninon'—whatever that may be—if, I say, such a condition confers an air of antiquity, the shop of 'Grey, Pharmaceutical Chemist,' as the inscription above it ran, possessed that air.

Within, while the grimy errand-boy lit the gas, the owner of the shop—a tall and rather good-looking man, with a loose, gaunt figure, and indifferent attire, carpet slippers, and a chin which had evidently not known the razor that day at any rate—leaned over the counter, talking to a stout, voluble, well-dressed individual, with bright, quick eyes and an emphatic forefinger.

Behind the shop high tea was proceeding. The back parlour was even more dingy and dusty and half-furnished than the shop. A faded Brussels carpet, black horse-hair covered chairs and sofa, curtains that once were green, a book-case turned into a cupboard, its glass doors lined with green glazed calico, the better to hide the tea and sugar, bread, and pickles, Worcester sauce, and cream gin, which lurked behind; a large table, set with cups and saucers and plates, bread-and-butter, and other viands, occupied the centre; a kettle, black and furry with the smoke of ages, sung and steamed upon a passably bright fire.

A stout lady presided over the tea-pot—stout, and not uncomely, with a fair allowance of corkscrew curls at each side of her face—the face itself being broad, and redeemed from plainness by a resolute and rather aquiline nose. She glanced round with a sharp look in her light quick eyes (not pleasant or attractive eyes, but very wide awake), and hastily tying back the bright red ribbons of her black lace cap, that they might not dip into tea or butter, said to the other inmates of the apartment, 'Come, now; don't dilly-dally when your victuals are ready.'

The other inmates were two girls with long crimped hair hanging down their backs; one high-shouldered and lanky, the other stout and dumpy; both in the transition stage between childhood and womanhood. Both obeyed the summons, the first dropping a crinoline she had been repairing, the other rising from the hearth-rug, where she had been tormenting the kitten. They took their evidently accustomed places, and proceeded to help themselves to the bread-and-butter, a pile of which occupied the middle of the table.

'Where are the boys?' asked the mother.

'Tom hasn't come in yet, and Dick is down-stairs helping Maggie with the lamp,' replied the youngest girl.

'She's a stupid thing not to understand it by this time; and indeed if the gas had been laid on as I wanted, and begged and prayed a'most on my bended knees, a year ago, what a save it would have been, both in money and trouble! But there is no use talking. Go, call your pa, Bell; he has been gossiping this hour with some of his scientific friends, that never buy so much as a box of cold cream—at least that *pay* for one.'

The elder girl rose and opened the door of communication with the shop; she returned immediately, saying, 'Pa will come directly.'

'Look for my handkerchief, Jemimar; I dropped it somewhere. I wish they would bring that lamp; for though the evenings do lengthen wonderfully, it's blind man's holiday.'

So saying, and having replenished her cup a second time she filled up the teapot with a lavish hand. As she did so the door leading into the house opened, and a boy of thirteen or fourteen—a pale, dirty-faced boy, with legs too long for his trowsers, and arms too long for his jacket sleeves—came in, holding with both hands a moderator lamp. He was followed by a girl, a slight girl, rather below middle height, not lanky, however, but rounded rather than thin; she was poorly dressed, in a dark stuff, somewhat the worse for wear, rubbed shiny in places, yet fitted neatly to her waist, while her white linen cuffs, and hair—soft brown hair, between light and dark—neatly parted, and drawn smoothly back into a thick roll behind, showed well by contrast with the untidiness of the people and the place. The mistress of the house (Mrs Grey, in short,) looked a trifle harder and sharper as her eyes fell on her. 'Your tea has been ready this hour,' she said. 'I'm sure if I had been so often about a thing as you have, Maggie, about that lamp, I would not want help with it—keeping Dick from his food all this time!'

'I did not want help with it, aunt,' replied Maggie, 'only to carry it up-stairs, for it is very heavy. Dick chose to stay and watch me—he was anything but a help.'

'And that's all the thanks you get,' cried his mother, 'for saving Miss Margaret Grey's nice cuffs from being soiled! Your uncle's daughters, Miss, can't treat themselves to such elegancies.'

'Well, aunt; I wash and iron them myself, so I suppose I have

a right to wear them,' returned the girl, wearily rather than defiantly.

'Who pays for the starch, I'd like to know?' was the triumphant rejoinder.

Maggie half opened her lips, very pretty, soft-looking lips, and a little tremulous just then—but closed them, closed them resolutely, and applied herself to cutting a slice of bread from the loaf instead of helping herself to one of the buttered slices, as the door opened and Mr Grey entered. He dropped into his usual place unnoticed, save by Maggie, who handed him his tea and drew the bread-and-butter within his reach.

'Thank you, my dear, thank you,' said the head of the house absently, not seeing who was attending to his wants. 'I have just been talking to old Mr Shepherd—a most intelligent and enlightened individual—and I quite agree with him that the cause of science was never so prosperous as'——

'I'm sure I don't know about science,' interrupted Mrs Grey, with no small bitterness of tone. 'But there's precious little prosperity here! And as to Mr Shepherd, there's pages and pages in the ledger with his name at the top of them, but I never can make out "Paid" at the bottom.'

'Well, all in good time, my dear,' said the chemist with a sort of deprecating, soothing tone, 'all in good time. He is a man of the highest principle, and the money will be all the better for coming in a lump.'

'Lump, indeed!' in a tone of the greatest scorn. 'It gives me a lump in the throat to hear you talk.'

'Uncle,' interposed Maggie, in a low voice, 'you must look at the paper I have been copying. I have finished it, but I am not sure about one or two passages.'

'Ha! hum! I hope you have made no mistakes,' said Mr Grey a little testily; 'for it is of very great importance.'

'What is it, pa?' asked Master Dick.

'Oh! an article on the properties of coal tar. A little contribution to the "Tyburnian Literary and Scientific Journal."'

'Which won't be let in—or paid for—at any rate,' grumbled Mrs Grey.

'I don't care so much about that,' said her husband resignedly, as he spread some dark-looking condiment, purporting to be potted herrings, with reckless thickness on his bread-and-butter. 'But I do want the true theory to be recognised: it would create a revolution in the art of dyeing.'

'Really, John,' said his wife, pathetically, 'it makes me sick to hear of the importance of everything except making your business pay; to think of the scatter-brained way you manage, and the bad debts you make; your indifference—your more than culpable indifference to your customers. Why is it you don't spend your time and labour finding out a hair restorer, or a skin reviver, or something of that kind, if you *will* be scientific, and try a lot of spirited advertisements, as any man of enterprise and business habits would do, if it was only to draw custom to the shop? But *you*—you never do nothing but write things that nobody reads, and talk away as civil and pleasant to them that are deep in your books as to them that pays regular. I've no patience with you!—while the children want clothes—and as to me—but it's no matter about me, though I did bring you good fifteen hundred pounds.'

Poor John Grey fidgeted on his seat, and looked piteously and imploringly at his wife. His eldest daughter murmured 'Law, ma! how you do talk!'

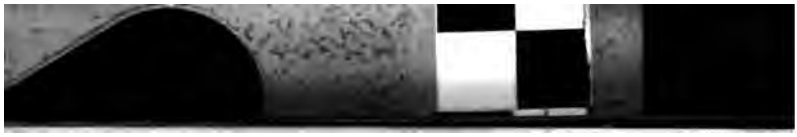
'No, indeed, aunt;' cried Maggie, 'many people care to read what he writes. Didn't the editor of the "Family Herald" notice his letter about chloroform, and write a most complimentary paper about it? And then the "Weekly Visitor" requested further communications; and'——

'Oh, of course,' interrupted her aunt, with heightened voice and colour, and pouring out some tea with a sort of vicious rapidity. 'Of course. You must always back up your uncle in all things. You know how to get up his sleeve; but you don't blind *me*.'

While she spoke, and unperceived by her, a young man entered—a short, square young man, with incipient whiskers and moustaches, a hat rather on one side, and a short cane sticking out of one pocket of his light grey paletot. 'I say, what's the row?' he asked, stopping in the doorway, and leaning one shoulder against the side of it. 'There you are, at it hammer and tongs, *as* usual.'

'Well, and no wonder, Tom,' said Mrs Grey, 'when I see your father letting his business go to sixes and sevens, and he spending his time on science and all that rubbish, and Maggie there encouraging him—Maggie, that ought to be keener after his interests than himself, considering all she owes him.

'Well, mother, stop that. Leave the governor and Maggie alone, do; and give me a cup of tea.' So saying, the eldest son dropped into a seat, and removing his hat, handed it to his youngest sister to put down. 'I'll not have Mag worried,' he continued, with an



insuperable tone of patronage. 'No, I won't. Oh, Margaret—pale, fair Margaret, queen of my soul, &c., &c., deign to give me the boot-jack.'

'Deign to get it for yourself,' returned Margaret, with supreme contempt.

Mrs Grey was suddenly quieted. If science was her husband's weak point, Master Tom was hers. Even the better informed, higher toned father thought Tom a fine fellow, only a little wild, like other young men; and hoped that by-and-by he would rise to be an ornament to the noble profession of which he was a student.

To Maggie he was simply intolerable and offensive to the last degree; but he was not actively unkind, not intentionally wounding—only after the nature of creatures like him, when a thing weaker and poorer and more defenceless than himself was to be found, it became almost a necessity to insult and show his superiority to it.

'Any news of the widow?' asked Tom, himself not quite twenty, but already *blasé* from experience in third-rate dissipation.

'Oh, Tom! I saw her stepping into a brougham as I was going out to school this afternoon,' cried the elder girl; 'and she had such a dress on—velvet moiré, and a velvet cloak all trimmed with sable, and a green velvet bonnet, and, my! what boots and gloves! She must be ever so rich!'

'I wonder would she stand a fiver, if a fellow told her he was hard up,' said Tom.

'You ought to try; screw up your courage, and ask her,' said Maggie, who had no great respect for her cousin's pluck.

'You should ask her for him,' said Dick. 'You are the favourite.'

'Yes,' chimed in Jemima; 'she was asking for you to-day, when you were out at the butcher's.'

Maggie laughed. 'I might ask it for my uncle; I certainly will not for Tom.'

'Now, isn't that cruel?' said Tom.

The widow was a lady who, about three weeks previously, had taken the drawing-room floor, which had lain vacant for many months, to Mrs Grey's despair.

She paid regularly, although inclined to drive a hard bargain; and, moreover, having had a cold and sore throat, had called in Mr Grey, and run up a very fair account for mixtures and gargles. She was good-looking and young—that is, perhaps, old-looking for twenty-five, or young-looking for thirty-five. Dressed very

grandly; talked a good deal of her solicitor and stockbroker, to see whom, she said, she had come over from the Continent at that unseasonable season. She drove out a good deal and had very few visitors.

To the chemist's family she seemed a goddess of beauty, wealth, and fashion; the only drawback to whose perfections was a tendency lately displayed to 'take up with Maggie,' as Mrs Grey phrased it. Yet for so fine a lady her habits were simple. She usually 'picked a bit' at one, or lunched while she was out, and had tea at the same hour the chemist's family had theirs. Maggie had seen to the preparation of a loin chop and some muffins for the drawing-room tea before she sat down to partake of her own.

Maggie made no reply, and to aggravate her, Tom repeated, 'You are a cruel Maggie—downright cruel.' As he spoke the door opened, and the maid-of-all-work said, 'Missus Berry would be glad to speak to Miss Grey.'

'Which Miss Grey?' asked the mistress testily.

'I dunno', ma'am; she said "Miss Grey."'

'You had better go, Bell.'

'Oh no, ma! It ain't me. It's Maggie.'

'Go back to Mrs Berry,' said Mrs Grey, authoritatively, 'and ask her if it is Miss Grey or Maggie.'

The last-named individual flushed up, but resolutely held her tongue.

In a few minutes the sooty servant reappeared. 'Please, it *is* Miss Maggie.' Whereupon there was silence for the space of half a minute.

Maggie rose, and went to an old-fashioned mahogany brass-bound desk, which stood on a table in the window, and took from it some sheets of paper. 'There, dear uncle, will you just see if it is right? and if not, I can correct it when I come back.'

'And pray remember there are all Tom's socks to be darned, and a tuck to be run in Jemima's petticoat,' called Mrs Grey, as she left the room.

Once out of sight, Maggie ran hastily upstairs, to avoid the hated sound of her aunt's voice, and knocked gently at the drawing-room door.

'Come in,' said rather a shrill voice. Maggie obeyed.

In a large well-proportioned room, dimly lighted by two candles and the fire, sat Mrs Berry, a table before her, littered, rather than

spread, with the tea-equipage, sundry account-books, and a number of bills, letters, notes, &c. A writing-book lay open by her side and she held a pen in her mouth. She was a tall, slight woman, a little high-shouldered, with very dark, almost black, hair, and a pale complexion; her teeth were large and prominent, conveying the idea that it would cost her some trouble to close her lips completely over them; but her eyes were passably good; and when dressed, her mouth shut, and just a *soupçon* of colour on her cheeks, she was not a bad-looking woman in reality, and absolutely a beauty, considering that she had £1200 a year to back up her reputation for loveliness. She was sitting as above described, with the pen at her mouth, and a puzzled weary expression on her countenance, which cleared up wonderfully as Maggie came across the gloom of the apartment into the fire-light.

'Law, my dear! why did you not come at once? You could not think I wanted that great stupid cousin of yours?'

'Well, no, Mrs Berry; but I did not like to contradict my aunt.'

'Oh yes—to be sure. I suppose they are all horrid jealous because I notice you. Never mind, you will do the best yet. Now I just want you to enter a few little things, and make up my book for me, and answer a note or two. It's very funny, I can do figures in my head, but I can't bear writing or ciphering, it makes my eyes and head ache like anything. Indeed Sir Jacob Raven, the great English doctor in Paris, says my brain is unusually delicate and quite unequal to much exertion.'

'Headaches must be very unpleasant,' said Maggie sympathetically, 'but it seems to me far more difficult to do sums or arithmetic in one's head than on paper.'

'Never mind—you set to work like a dear. Sit down, here's the book.' And hastily vacating her seat, Mrs Berry placed a neatly bound account-book before Maggie. The first pages were sadly blotched and scratched, but after a certain date in the current February another hand and neater workmanship appeared.

'I spent a lot of money yesterday,' said Mrs Berry, taking an old envelope, scrawled over with pencil marks, out of her pocket. 'What day of the month was it yesterday?'

'The 27th.'

'And will to-morrow be the 1st of March?'

'No, no, it is leap year.'

'So it is. Well, I declare if a certain person was here I'd be inclined to try my chance,' said the widow laughing.

'How?' asked Maggie absently, for she was choosing a fresh pen.

'Don't you know the privilege of leap year, you little goose?' returned Mrs Berry, playfully.

'Oh yes, of course! The ladies may propose. I am sure you would never do so.'

'Well, I don't know! There's a gentleman, a man in France, has long been an admirer of mine; but he is shy or something, and he won't speak out.' Maggie laughed.

'I am quite ready, Mrs Berry,' she said.

'Well, let me see. Yesterday there was three shillings for paper and envelopes, and two-and-ninepence for a pair of gloves, one shilling for a photograph of the Princess Alice, such a sweet-looking creature!—then two shillings to the driver. Ain't it a shame,' said Mrs Berry, interrupting herself, 'they don't charge the drivers in with the brougham? Have you got that down?'

'Yes—what else?'

'Eighteen-pence for a plate of soup and a glass of sherry at Verey's; and then, what I must say I do begrudge, fourteen shillings for two stalls at the Olympic, that I engaged for Miss Salter and myself, and after promising to come she sends me this note,' holding up a pink morsel of paper with an elaborate monograph in gold at the top, 'saying indeed that she was obliged to go to an impromptu dance at dear Lady Tufton's, and regretted not being able to come with me; as if I didn't know she had worked might and main to be asked, and has somehow got an invitation at the last moment; and so I have spent my money and lost the play as well. It *is* too bad,' cried the widow, with the sound as of tears in her voice; 'but she is no lady, for all the airs she gives herself. And though she is daughter to Sir Somebody Salter, he was only a City knight. I will never forgive her! for you know I could not go by myself! To be sitting moping here, instead of seeing the "Lady of Lyons," and wasting my money into the bargain! It is *too* bad!'

'Yes, it is a great shame,' said Maggie, with hearty sympathy. She had once seen a play, and with her the theatre meant Elysium; therefore to be disappointed in such a project was indeed bad treatment in Maggie's eyes.

The widow was touched by such evidently true feeling, and fired with a sudden inspiration, exclaimed, 'I don't see why I should lose my money or amusement either. Suppose you come with me?

I'm sure you look much more genteel than that stuck up Miss Salter; and as far as the cab goes, she might have made fine speeches, but she would never go halves, not she. So just run away and put on your best frock: it's only half-past six.'

'Oh! Mrs Berry, dear Mrs Berry,' cried Maggie, blushing to the eyes in a mingled agony of delight and doubt. 'It would be too enchanting to go to the theatre; but *this* is my only dress, and I am not fit to go with a lady like you.'

'No other dress!' cried Mrs Berry with unaffected horror. 'Goodness gracious! what a shame! Never mind, that shan't stop us. I have a black silk skirt, and a muslin body, and an opera cloak, will just do you. Come let us put away these things and go and dress, and then' (as if it was a great privilege) 'you shall dress *me*.'

'Oh! how can I thank you enough?' exclaimed Maggie. 'But my aunt! I must ask her leave, and she is sure to be vexed.'

'I'll just send her a message. I flatter myself I pay a good deal too regular to be refused,' said Mrs Berry with a toss of her head. She rang the bell, and on the appearance of the 'slavey' from below sent her compliments to Mrs Grey, and would she allow Miss Maggie to go with her to the theatre, as she was disappointed of a friend who was to have gone with her.

The space of time taken to deliver this message and carry back the answer seemed interminable to poor Maggie, although the energetic widow made her light a chamber candle and come into her room, where she speedily set to work to disembowel a portmanteau and extricate the silk skirt and muslin body from its depths.

In due course a reply came, 'that Mrs Berry was welcome to take Miss Maggie if she liked.'

'Or to any other rubbish in the house as well,' said Maggie, with a laugh that might have been bitter had she not had the immediate prospect of so much joy.

'Now then, just bring the other candles, like a good girl,' cried Mrs Berry. 'I can't see to do my hair, and you can be changing your dress until I am ready to have mine fastened. Why don't you pull off your frock?' continued Mrs Berry, after a moment's pause.

'Oh! if you would not mind,' returned Maggie blushing vehemently, 'I should like to speak to my uncle before I go—and—and—I will put on these things in my own little room, and be back to fasten your dress before you are ready.'

'Do as you like, child, but I would not go near those ill-natured things, if I were you.'

'My uncle is not ill-natured," said Maggie firmly; 'he has done everything for me, and I do not care for the others.' She ran quickly from the room; depositing the skirt and jacket in a loose bundle at the foot of the stair leading to her 'upper chamber. She rapidly descended to the common sitting-room, where gloom sat on every brow save Mr Grey's.

Poor Maggie felt terribly guilty as she came in, even as though she had stolen pleasure from Bell and Jemima, and dashed the cup of joy from her aunt's lips. How ardently she wished they were all going to the play, provided she was not to be with them. Poor things! such ineffable good fortune was not to be theirs. But Maggie felt at that moment, with all the keenness of a generous spirit, that pleasure costs too dear which mortifies another.

Mr Grey alone was unmoved and absorbed in the perusal of the sheets Maggie had left with him.

'Uncle dear! I am obliged to go with Mrs Berry, and indeed I am very pleased, but I will get up an hour earlier to correct those sheets, if you will only mark what is wrong in pencil.'

'Thank you, my dear; they seem all right so far. I'm glad you are going to have a treat.'

'Well! if I was you, Mag, I'd have more spirit than to go in that old brown stuff,' said Mrs Grey.

'A regular Cinderella, by Jove!' sneered Tom.

'Never mind; we all know who won in *that* story,' said Maggie, with good-humoured defiance. Keeping her own counsel as to her borrowed finery and kissing her uncle lovingly, she left the room.

About a quarter of an hour after, and just as the widow, having made preliminaries to her elaborate toilet, had begun to wonder what had become of 'that girl,' Maggie entered her room, so metamorphosed that Mrs Berry started. The white muslin body adorned with scarlet velvet bows, was neatly drawn in at the waist by a black band. The black silk skirt flowed in full and easy folds, and at night its shabbiness could not be seen. In lieu of any other ornament, some of the soft brown hair was twisted into a coronet across her head, that lent something of stateliness to her carriage.

'Why, my goodness!' cried the widow, 'how wonderfully my old things set you off! You are not like the same girl! Have you a turn for hair-dressing? I'm sure I wish you'd do up mine the

same way you do your own. There's no time now, but you will do it some evening?'

'Whenever you like, and as often as you like,' cried Maggie, glowing with gratitude, as she proceeded to 'lace up' Mrs Berry's dress and alter the position of a bunch of damask roses with which her head was adorned.

'I declare you have a great deal of taste, Maggie. There, that will do; we had better go,' cried Mrs Berry, glancing at her looking-glass with no small complacency. 'Here, put on this opera cloak—there now—you might be an earl's daughter, as far as looks go, if we *do* by any chance meet any one.'

So saying Mrs Berry carefully extinguished the candles, first lighting one in the bed-room candlestick, and returned to the sitting-room. 'Dear, dear!' she said, 'I never thought of asking you to take anything! There's a drop of tea and a bit of muffin left, but they are both stone cold now.'

Margaret declared with truth that she could not eat a morsel. 'Well, we'll have something when we come in,' said Mrs Berry, ringing for the 'slavey,' whom she directed to call a cab. 'And mind you have some oysters—do you care for oysters?' to Maggie, who said she did not. 'Well, a dozen oysters, some brown bread and butter, and a pint, no three half-pints, of stout ready, and the table laid, by eleven. We may be a little later—but don't *you* be late.'

At last they were off. To look out at the gaily dressed and lighted shops was delightful, the drive in a rough rattling cab enchanting, feeling all the time that she was on the road to the highest enjoyment, and to Maggie a cab seemed a most distinguished mode of conveyance—something quite aristocratic. True, that on reaching the temple of delight, Mrs Berry rather tarnished the elevated feeling; for she did not hesitate to stand on the kerbstone, in her green and gold opera cloak, and haggle over sixpence with the cabman. At last however the magic portals were passed, and almost dizzy with the transition from the sordid gloom of Beverly Street to the brilliancy of a well-filled, well-lighted house, Maggie took her place beside her patroness, and became at once absorbed in the rather insipid dialogue going on between a smart servant girl and a heavy groom which formed a large ingredient in a small farce that served to 'lift the curtain,' as our neighbours say, and to give time for the august stars who were to shine forth in the principal piece to arrive.

'Look! there is a curious *toilette* in the left-hand stage box,' said Mrs Berry, who rather piqued herself on her French. But Maggie was far too much absorbed to pay attention to such trifles. In the interval before 'The Lady of Lyons' began she was conscious that an elderly gentleman, with very white hair and a red face, came into a seat next Mrs Berry, and that she talked rather eagerly to him; but she did not heed what they said. It was this:—

'Why! I never expected to see you here, Mr Dunsford,' began Mrs Berry.

'I am rather surprised at it myself,' he returned; 'but I have a sister and her daughter up from the country, so I must show them the lions. You are not alone, I suppose?'

'No, indeed!' in rather an injured tone. 'This young lady is with me—as a great treat.'

Mr Dunsford scanned Maggie rather closely.

'Nice girl,' he whispered; 'quiet, genteel! Well, Mrs Berry, the sale of those houses is nearly arranged. I think we may release you in about a fortnight. You must think how you would like to place the money.'

'I'm sure I can't tell—something that pays well and is safe.

'Not so easy to find, my dear lady. Ah, here's the owner of this place coming back. I'll try and call upon you to-morrow, about five. I want to talk to you about one or two matters. Good evening.' And Dunsford dragged himself back to his place, past the intervening seats bristling with crinolines, taking another searching look at Maggie as he went.

But of this, of everything in the real world, she was soon unconscious and oblivious. Her heart throbbed only for the joys and sorrows of Claude Melnotte and Pauline, until that terrible dark curtain fell, and blotted out a world of love and fancy, trial and triumph, of nobility, generosity, and poetical justice, and our disenchanted little Maggie was carried back to the sordidness of everyday life, and the not very exhilarating occupation of cutting bread-and-butter for Mrs Berry to consume with her oysters.

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning was cold and raw, with an occasional fall of frozen rain.

The chemist's family had scattered to their usual avocations; but the paterfamilias—good easy soul—had availed himself of the untoward state of the weather to indulge in an extra half-hour's doze, and was consequently late, for which he had received a stern rebuke from his wife, and she now watched him with an unbending aspect as he buttered his toast and sipped his tea.

'Things are coming to a pretty pass,' she said at length. 'There was Miss Maggie out till nearly twelve o'clock last night, amusing herself at the theatre, and my daughters off to bed at ten, night after night, without an out or a change of any kind from one year's end to another.'

'It was not her doing,' said the chemist meekly. 'You would not have disobliged Mrs Berry by refusing to let Maggie go I suppose?'

Oh, you are always supposing something. But I want to know what she sees in that girl to prefer to ours? I am sure there's far more style about Jemima, let alone Bell.'

'Yes, to be sure,' said the father; 'but then they are younger; not such companions for a woman of Mrs Berry's age.'

'Well, whatever it may be, I'll not stand such goings on in my house. If I was Maggie I'd go out as a nursery governess or a nursery maid, rather than live upon an uncle who has mouths enough to fill.'

'Why, my dear,' said Mr Grey, setting down his cup in no small surprise, 'I thought you would not hear of such a thing. Why, when Miss Marshall offered to take her as a pupil teacher to fit her for earning her own bread, you said she would learn more and be of more use with you than at school. And now I think it cruel to reproach the poor girl, for really I don't see what she can do but write and cipher.'

'And read novels,' said Mrs Grey, with a sneer. 'I am sure the time she wastes'—

'All young people are alike,' sighed Mr Grey. 'But I cannot

forget the solemn promise I gave her poor mother when she was dying, that I would never desert her child.'

'Well, and who wants you to desert her?' asked Mrs Grey. Haven't I put up with her patiently? ay, with the patience of a saint! All I want you to do is to keep her in her place. She's not a bad girl; but she won't bear having her head turned.'

'Where's Tom?' asked the chemist, as a diversion.

'He has rather a headache,' said Mrs Grey, with a little hesitation. 'So I let him have a cup of tea in his bed. And, would you believe it? Maggie refused to take him up his breakfast!'

'Well, perhaps she was right; you forget these children are young men and women now.'

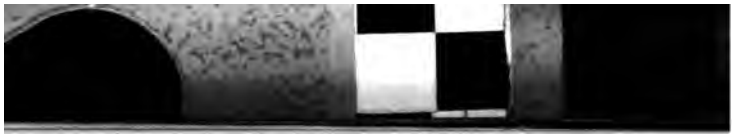
'No, I don't forget,' said Mrs Grey, 'And that's just one of the things that makes me think it would be better if Maggie were away. She's such a provoking minx; so cool, that she always seems to get the better of one.'

The chemist heaved a deep sigh; but as he was about to speak the errand-boy opened the shop door and shouted, 'Wanted, sir!' Whereupon Mr Grey, considerably relieved, shuffled away in his carpet slippers. As soon as he was gone, Mrs Grey proceeded with some celerity and much noise to wash up the tea-things, and then she dusted the room and swept up the fire-place. All this, with an expression of gloom and uncertainty on her brow. She was evidently puzzled, and when she had finished these labours she pulled forth from a lower division of the book-case a large basket full of socks, more or less dilapidated, and drawing one on her hand, sat lost in thought. To her entered Maggie, pale and heavy-eyed with the unwonted excitement of the night before.

'Oh, let me, aunt!' she exclaimed, with a sort of dim desire to atone for her good fortune.

'There then, take them; I want to go out,' said Mrs Grey, quietly, and vacating her seat for Maggie, she left the room.

Maggie took up the sock her aunt had left and set diligently to work, running parallel lines of wonderful regularity to and fro, with the ease and accuracy induced by long practice, while her thoughts wandered far away; first dreamily, to the vivid touching scenes of the night before, and the renewed sharpness they had lent to the longing she so often felt to love and be beloved—to be of importance to any living creature. So by a natural transition she thought of her mother, who was the ideal of her memory—the deepest, the only love of her heart. The grace and beauty and



tenderness that memory recalled had, however, very homely surroundings; still, how dear and hallowed was the picture conjured up! A small shop, low and not very well lighted, with a wide low window, and a door, half glass, opening into the paved street of an old cathedral town, picturesque with pointed gables, projecting windows, and queer vane-topped turrets.

Within, a store of bright-coloured Berlin wools and beads, canvas and crochet patterns, a moderate supply of fancy stationery, and a little pile of publications from the Religious Tract Society, all presided over by a slight graceful woman, with soft blue eyes, looking tenderly out from under a widow's cap, which just gave a glimpse of the fair hair gathered beneath it. A woman who moved gently, but quickly, to and fro, in her long black garments, and was so much a gentlewoman in manner and dealing that the wives of the Church dignitaries—even Mrs Dean herself—when they entered that little den-like repository, treated its mistress like one of themselves. And then Maggie saw herself return from school, where she went each morning with undeviating punctuality, her little satchel in her hand, looking joyfully for the loving welcome she always knew awaited her—in words and tender inquiries as to her conduct and progress during the day, if the little shop was empty, and in a silent kiss, if customers demanded the widow's attention. While the grand ladies from the Close would notice her condescendingly, and observe, 'How your little girl grows, Mrs Grey! She will soon be a help to you.' And then the delightful tea, in a tiny back parlour that looked over a garden belonging to one of the large houses on the city walls; a little shrine of love and peace, where the mother would sit through the quiet winter's evening sewing diligently, and Maggie, after conning her lessons, would read to her or help her in her work; or better still, in the long summer days, take sunset rambles by the river-side, and drink in the loveliness of the scene, where the old Cathedral towers and the rugged red walls of the Castle stood out, marvellously beautified by glorious evening hues.

Ah! sweet dreams—sweet memories! For all the small childish troubles and rebellions were blotted out of sight, and only the delicious rest and security of entire love and trust remembered. And working mechanically on, large slow tears dropped upon the sock as she thought, and the pretty little head, with its simple coil of brown hair, drooped lower, the curve of neck and shoulder—the very pose of the hands—all bespeaking such despondency.

Maggie was the only child of the chemist's younger brother—a handsome, clever, useless individual—who, at the outset of his career (as an artist), intended to rival Sir Joshua Reynolds. After passing through the various stages of high hopes and pretensions, jealousy of inferior competitors, neglected merit, and unconquerable ill-luck, which invariably await sensitive, boneless geniuses of his class, he became a drawing-master of some reputation, and great popularity among his young lady pupils, being gentle and chivalric in manner, and certainly good-looking.

In this capacity he met a young lady, the pupil teacher in a large school. She was the penniless orphan daugnter of a clergyman, a man of good but decayed family, and had been placed, through the charity of friends and relations, in a semi-fashionable establishment, with the intention of fitting her to earn her own living.

She pleased the artistic and fastidious eye of William Grey; while she, poor young thing, was soon utterly captivated by his gentleness, genius, wrongs, and beauty. The charitable friends and relations, truly delighted to get the burden shifted on to other shoulders, nodded their respectable heads, bestowed their paternal benedictions, and presented the young couple with a large Bible and small tea service, and so washed their hands handsomely of the concern; except one old reprobate, who had been a long time in India; he gave the bridegroom a box of cigars and twenty pounds to the bride; but then he died not long after, and only left enough to bury him 'decent.'

To do the artist justice, he only wanted the fair gentle girl herself; and so they lived on together for a few scrambling, pinched, happy years; always going to make some great hit, and be rich and luxurious, but somehow never making it.

Till one hot summer Willie Grey, as he was generally called, stayed out very late sketching in Richmond Park, and, moreover, tempted by heat and thirst, partook largely of half-ripe plums at a fruit-stall. There was a good deal of sickness going at the time, which alarmists called cholera.

Willie Grey was by no means plucky where sickness was in question; he was attacked, and speedily succumbed; dying more of fright than absolute disease.

His widow, with one little girl, was left destitute, save for some trifles of furniture and pictures. But Mrs Grey, whose soul was wrapped up in her child, was brave and energetic for her sake; both she and her husband had a knack of making friends, and

after much exertion she contrived to open the Berlin wool and fancy repository above described. She selected the town in which her father had laboured as a curate, justly judging that a widowed mother, struggling to maintain herself and her child, would be doubly interesting where she was not unknown, and so she managed to glean enough to keep life and soul together in the vineyard her father had once cultivated. She did more; she succeeded in establishing a tolerable business, and brighter times seemed dawning, when a sudden and severe chill developed the seeds of consumption and life's changing scene fast closed upon her.

John Grey was with his brother's widow at the last. To his care she confided her little Maggie, and in the sincerest spirit he accepted the charge.

But she had yet a respite. The excellent woman whose school she had long attended offered to keep her, if she would assist in taking care of the younger children, and here Maggie remained for a couple of years, till her benefactress was induced to break up her establishment and marry an old sweetheart who had returned from Australia, rich, rough, but unchanged in heart. After this, poor Maggie's life became a sort of Cinderella existence, in the sordid atmosphere where she was every one's servant, and no one's favourite except her uncle's. To him she was secretary, book-keeper, everything, being a bright capable creature. At times she was permitted to join the young ladies, her cousins, in their daily attendance at a second-rate school; but soon she was found to be too useful at home to be spared, and so, with her ardent desire for information and improvement, she was doomed to a round of the commonest drudgery, without a chance beyond.

I said she was no one's favourite save her uncle's; but she had another—her uncle's eldest son by a first marriage, a great large-boned, loose-limbed boy, who looked like a Newfoundland pup, scarce able to manage his own strength. He naturally sided against his stepmother, and while he soothed Maggie with his sympathy, considerably embittered his stepmother's feelings by his injudicious championship. But Cousin John heard of something more suited to his tastes and energies than rolling pills or concocting mixtures, and departed for the Cape of Good Hope, three years before the opening of this story, when Maggie was yet barely fifteen.

So Maggie sat and darned away, and folded up sock after sock, while she pondered on her position, and sought, in every recess of her imagination, for some means of escape. What could she do?

She knew scarce anything of French or music, for what little she had once learned she had nearly forgotten. She felt she was quite unfit to teach, even as a nursery governess. 'They all profess French,' she thought despondingly. 'Could I get into a shop, to do the accounts?' It might be foolish, but Maggie shrank from a shop. The traditions of her childhood pointed to a higher social grade. Her mother's standard of manner was something far beyond anything she saw in her uncle's family, while Tom and his companions were inexpressibly revolting to her. She was almost ashamed to acknowledge it to herself, but it was a punishment to her to sit in the same room with them; probably all the men in shops would be like them. Her own idea of a gentleman was taken from a very refined personage of more than middle age—a quaint old bachelor, who used to occupy a couple of rooms in her mother's house part of every summer, for the purpose of fishing in some trout streams for which the neighbourhood of the old town where they lived was famous—one of the school to whom every woman was a lady in right of her sex. Alas! turn which way she would, Maggie's path seemed but a *cul-de-sac*, a long monotonous lane without an outlet. Nevertheless, she dared not let go the hope that some unexpected turning might offer itself to vary the horrible routine of her life.

And as she thought, Mrs Grey returned.

Smiles were on her lip and a parcel under her arm. 'Well, Maggie,' she said, 'I have not been very long. Now what do you think I have been about?' She sat down with an air of joyous good-humour, rather alarming from its rarity.

'I am sure I cannot tell,' said Maggie, rising uneasily to replace the basket in its usual position.

'If you will not guess, I must tell,' replied Mrs Grey, beginning to unfold her parcel. 'So I have just been and gone and bought you a new dress.'

'Have you really?' cried Maggie, with sparkling eyes, turning gratefully towards her aunt, and feeling as if a scuttlefull of hot coals had been heaped upon her head. 'How good of you! And I know you have not much to spare.'

'Well, it isn't my present,' said Mrs Grey, frowning slightly at a speech the candid sympathy of which vexed her ignoble soul. 'But while you were gallivanting to the play last night we had a letter from John, who seems to have fallen on his legs. Your uncle has his letter, and it appears he has got into a capital house, all because

he happened to play draughts with the principal partner on the way out. He must have an excellent situation, for he has sent Mr G.' (such was her appellation for her husband) 'twenty pounds; and he says, after mentioning the bank where the order was to be cashed, "Be sure you buy Mag a new dress." So I thought I would lose no time, but just popped out to the Edgeware Road, and there it is!' Having reached the climax, she suddenly unfolded ten yards—a dress length, we believe—of a bright green lustre, with yellow spots.

'Oh!' escaped involuntarily from Maggie's lips, as she gazed with dismay on the proudly displayed gift.

'Why, what's the matter?—isn't it good enough?'

'Oh, yes, aunt; it's not that—but—but—I am sure John is so good, and so are you, to take all that trouble; but I am afraid the colour will not wear well, and I am sure I shall not look well in green.'

'Look well!' echoed Mrs Grey, with a sort of angry contempt. 'I suppose you are going to set up for a beauty after going to the theatre in borrowed clothes, whereas you ought to be thankful to have a gown to your back. I never, no never, met such a stuck-up minx as you are! Who clothes and feeds and boards and lodges you, but me? Have you a penny or a rag in the world you can call your own?'

'You are right,' returned Maggie, who, galled, insulted, crushed by the unanswerable reproach, was calm, with a sort of desperation. 'You are quite right. I am a penniless dependent, but I thought I owed all to my uncle—not to *you*. However'——

'Your uncle!' interrupted Mrs Grey, with scornful eyes and flaming cheeks. 'Your uncle, indeed! What would he be but for my money!'

'Hear me,' cried Maggie. 'I was about to say that if I go as a servant even—and I know,' she added with a sad humility, 'that I am scarce fit even for that—I shall not burden *you* much longer. I promise that within a fortnight you shall be relieved.' She spoke, in the excitement of the moment, without a plan, without a thought, but as the words escaped her she felt herself bound to fulfil them, cost what it would.

'And you'll be no great loss,' cried Mrs Grey contemptuously, treating this outburst as a mere ebullition of temper. 'It's all very fine; I'd like to see who would take you. They had better not come to me for your character, for of all the cantankerous—there take it!

And suddenly throwing the despised dress with contemptuous fury at her niece's feet, she hastily rushed from the room, as if fearing to trust herself any further.

It would not be a pleasant task to disentangle and delineate the painful angry confusion of Maggie's thoughts and feelings, as, leaning her elbows on the table, she covered her face with her hands, and, quivering from head to foot, bit her lips to keep in the passionate sobs that swelled her throat. This woman, this low woman, her inferior, to possess the power to wound and gall her! How she longed to rend and trample her adversary! For poor Maggie was no angel.

Come what would, she would go, if she ran away, even to some unknown and dreadful fate. What could be worse than the life she led? And the memory of the dear and tender mother she had loved and lost came back to her with an agony of affection and regret that swelled her heart to bursting—a sense of her own isolation from ties and love and all that makes life dear, so keen, that death at the moment would have been welcome.

The tears of the young, if readily dried, have a bitterness of their own. As yet, the joy or sorrow of the instant is eternal to them—they can imagine neither sunshine nor shade beyond. It takes the dreary teaching of after years to convince them not only that 'the day drags on, though storms keep out the sun,' but also that beyond the present glorious sheen of love and light and joy the inexorable onward march of time goes on and on into the clouds and thick darkness which may lie beyond. Yes, there are compensations everywhere, and maturity knows full well that until death comes, the unceasing flow of life's stream must bring change alike to joy and sorrow.

But to Maggie the present was an agony of rage and pain, and nothing beyond.

She was interrupted by the opening of the door which led into the shop, and Mr Grey entered, his hands and face very black, and his garments largely splashed with some terrible compound which smelt of vinegar and gunpowder.

'Is your aunt in?' he asked, in a tone of some apprehension.

'I don't know,' said Maggie, in a choking voice, rising quickly to her feet, hoping to escape observation. 'I believe she is out.'

'Get me a towel and some water, will you, like a good girl? Mr M—— and I have been trying a very interesting experiment, and somehow I've got into a horrible mess. Make haste, my dear.'

Maggie sped away right willingly, and soon brought him all he wanted; waiting on him with a kindly readiness, which, unobservant as he was, he felt rather than noticed. 'Why, Maggie!' he exclaimed, as he laid aside the towel and proceeded to turn down his cuffs, 'what's the matter? You've been crying. Now I hope you have not been quarrelling with your aunt. You know I must not, I mean I cannot, allow you to contradict or aggravate her. You must remember she is your benefactress,' cried poor Grey, nervously hedging his book, lest the sharp ears of Mrs G. might by any chance be within reach.

'No!' said Maggie, with sudden courage, throwing her arms round him. '*You* are my benefactor! I owe *her* nothing, but insult and unkindness. I could bear anything from you, do anything for you; but for your wife! Oh, I should like never to see her again. Ah, uncle, for mercy's sake—for the sake of my poor mother—help me to leave your house—to go anywhere, to do anything to escape.' And Maggie strained her uncle to her heart with a vehemence that almost frightened the good easy man.

'Come, come, Mag, don't talk like that. Where would you go? What could you do? You are like a daughter of my own. Be sensible. I suppose your aunt, who has been a good deal put out about Tom, has been speaking sharp. Pooh! pooh! You must not mind half she says. Look now. Where is it? There was such a capital letter from John last night; you shall see what he sends you; it will quite cheer you up to read it. Where can it be? I don't think I gave it to Mrs G.,' rummaging his pockets. 'I suppose I did.' And in his hopes of turning the subject he sought hastily hither and thither.

'Oh, I know all about it,' said Maggie, dejectedly. 'My aunt has brought me *that*,' pointing to the heap of green stuff lying on the floor.

Here Mr Grey upset a large and most respectable-looking Bible, which always lay on an unsteady little table beside Mrs Grey's arm-chair; it fell with a crash, and as Maggie lifted it she saw a letter that had slipped from between the pages. 'Is this it, uncle?

'Yes—yes; *there*, you read that, and see what a kind cousin you have, and don't think or talk nonsense any more.' So saying, Mr Grey left the room.

A little turned from her wrath and grief, Maggie put the letter in her pocket, folded up the objectionable green lustre, very carefully enveloping it in the paper appertaining thereto, put the room

in order, and then fled away to her own little corner in a big garret, where she kept the few treasures belonging to her—a few children's story books, with carefully penned loving inscriptions on their fly-leaves, a few school prizes, a hair chain her mother used to wear (the watch had long ago been disposed of), and a miniature of her mother, painted with his utmost skill by her father—no great thing as a work of art, but precious beyond compare to their child. It was her companion, her *confidante*. Albeit far too healthy a girl, mentally and physically, for morbid fancies, there was so much pain in her present, and memory depicted so much of pleasure and peace in the past, that every relic of her mother had for her a talismanic charm.

Here, in the cold and gloom of a London back attic, Maggie wept gentler tears; and, still with indistinct yet resolute purpose to escape her aunt's thraldom, she opened her cousin's letter with somewhat languid curiosity.

It was a rugged epistle, yet not without traces of ability in its concise details. After some temperately kind expressions, the writer described in a few words how he had fortunately found favour with a former fellow-passenger, bound like himself to Cape Town, who proved to be the head of a large mercantile firm there. That he had been taken in as a clerk, at a humble salary, through this gentleman's interest, and in course of time sent up the country to buy wool for shipment to England. In this transaction he had acted with such promptitude as to secure a cargo just before a sudden rise in the price of the commodity, which enabled his employers to clear a large profit on the venture. They were liberal open-handed men, and made him a handsome present.

'I can therefore have the pleasure of sending you twenty-five pounds, my dear father, for I know it is a strain with you to make the two ends meet,' the letter continued; 'five of these are for little Maggie, who has no one to give her anything, that she may rig herself out. Give her my love, and tell her she shall never want a friend while cousin John is to the fore.'

A few additional lines indicated some weariness of office life, and an inclination to join an exploring party who were preparing for a march into the interior.

'Poor dear John! What a pity he is so far away,' said Maggie to herself, dropping the letter into her lap. 'Now I can pay back my aunt some of her cruel taunts! How could she be so mean, so dishonest, as to rob me of the money I want so sorely? And to

bring me that hideous green stuff to make a fright of me! It is too—too bad.'

Here Maggie's musings were interrupted by a shout from the bottom of the garret stair of 'Miss Maggie, you're wanted; Mrs Berry's calling for you.'

CHAPTER III.

Mrs Berry was looking a little anxious when Maggie, having striven hastily to wash away the traces of her tears and emotion, obeyed her summons. 'What has become of you?' she cried. 'I have wanted you so bad! There's my book. We went off last night before it was half done, and now Mr Dunsford is coming at five to look over my money matters, and I should like my book made all right in case I do show it to him; though he has no business to see my private accounts, but he is a great help to me. He was poor dear Mr Berry's dearest friend, and though he did not like the marriage, he has always been a good friend to me. My husband was a great deal older than me; but law! he was twice as clever and had a first-rate education. I'm sure he was a good kind soul—but double my age, my dear—so I always like everything to look clean and squared up for Mr Dunsford.'

While she talked, Mrs Berry bustled to and fro, and arranged the writing materials and books. So Maggie schooled herself—especially as she had a dim hope Mrs Berry might help her—and made entry after entry, cast up, carried forward, ruled neat lines, and finished all to Mrs Berry's satisfaction nearly a quarter of an hour before that appointed for the visit.

'There now! that's all very nice and comfortable,' said the widow. 'I'll just smooth my hair and put on a fresh collar—and you can tell me what you have been crying about till your eyes are like boiled gooseberries! Come, tell me all about it.'

Whereupon Maggie, thankful to find a friend of any kind, opened her heart to a certain extent. The little passage touching Cousin John's present of five pounds, she suppressed. She would not expose her dear uncle's wife to the scorn of a stranger; but

her wrongs in respect of the hideous green dress, she could not conceal.

Mrs Berry was sympathising and indignant. 'A twopenny halfpenny lustre indeed! I know 'em' (the widow was apt to curtail the word them of its due proportions when in a hurry); 'nine and six the dress—and just shrivel up after a shower of rain as if there was running strings all over them. You just find out where she bought it, and take it back; better put a few shillings to the price, and get something that would be of some use—though I'm sure your cousin meant handsome!'

'Oh, Mrs Berry!' cried Maggie, her soft grey eyes deepening and sparkling with the intense desire of the moment. 'I don't care about that wretched dress,—I don't care about anything but to get away—to earn a living—and yet I can do so little.'

'Why, goodness gracious! You write and cipher beautifully and spell wonderful! Couldn't you go out governessing? But, law! that's poor work, and very little chance of a husband—well, I'll just think.'

'Please'm, a gentleman for Mrs Berry,' said the sooty servant.

'There, that's Dunsford! You must go. I'll send for you to-morrow—just put away my bonnet and things, like a good girl. I'll send for you to-morrow, and have a talk.'

Margaret slowly, thoughtfully, but very neatly folded and put away the widow's handsome walking attire, which lay scattered on the bed and chairs. She was schooling herself to go down and meet her aunt, and we fear a little exulting in the means of reprisal that lay hid in her pocket; then she began faintly to hope that some way of escape might open to her through Mrs Berry. Maggie was too young, too grateful by nature, to form a very just estimate of that lady. She thought her kind and powerful, and rather grand; but the native instinct of her taste and feeling withheld the terms ladylike or pretty. To the rest of the family Mrs Berry was indisputably a 'great lady.'

At length, Maggie groped her way down to tea. She was very hungry, poor child,—for she had been too indignant and unhappy to come down to the family dinner. An expression of feeling which had called forth so much unqualified abuse from Mrs Grey, that the meek chemist had at last revolted, and words had ensued between him and that shrewd woman of business, his wife, which, of course, ended in the total rout of her lord. At this passage of arms, none of the younger members of the family assisted. Among

them Maggie was rather a favourite; snubbed and looked down on a little perhaps as an utterly penniless dependent,—nevertheless too bright, too capable, to be unimportant. Tom was out as usual. An air of gloom pervaded the family circle as Maggie entered. Mrs Grey looked both cross and fretted—at least, so it seemed to Maggie—as she took her accustomed seat by her uncle, full of her resolution to pay her aunt back some of the numerous debts she owed her, on the score of unkindness and gratuitous insult. But even while she felt in her pocket for John Grey's letter, she was surprised to find her determination melting away.

It seemed to hurt herself to have to accuse another—a creature like herself, capable of being wounded and humiliated—of such mean dishonesty. No, she felt that such revenge would cost her too dear. She had never intended to have broached the subject before her uncle and cousins, but now she made up her mind not to allude to it even when she was alone with Mrs Grey, but quietly return the letter to her uncle, who, satisfied with having given it to Maggie, would take no further heed of the matter—and so it would end.

But poor Mr Grey was doomed to bring vials of wrath upon his head that evening, for, feeling the long-continued silence oppressive, he suddenly broke it by addressing Maggie. 'Well! John seems to have fallen on his legs, eh?'

'Yes, indeed,' said Maggie, colouring up, and feeling unaccountably guilty.

'What! how?' asked Mrs Grey, uneasily. 'I have told Maggie all about the letter, and John's generosity, and a pretty return she makes for it.'

A short silence ensued, and for a moment Maggie hoped the danger was passed; but alas! papa Grey *would* have it. 'Give me the letter, Maggie, I want to see what he says about that exploring expedition.' And Maggie, her heart beating with fearful rapidity, drew forth the fatal epistle, and handed it to her uncle. At the sight of it, Mrs Grey turned crimson, her eyes sank, she fidgeted on her chair, and then suddenly left the room. 'What's the matter?' cried Mr Grey looking up. 'Is she not well? Go and see after your mother, Bell.'

Bell soon returned to say that Mrs Grey's 'nose was bleeding—and they were to put away the tea-things, she did not want any more.' These directions were accordingly carried out, and after a while Miss Bell retired, to assist Jemima and the 'girl' in the pri-

vate manufacture of some toffee down-stairs; Mr Grey, to read in peace behind his shop desk, and Dick ran out to have a surreptitious game with the errand boy.

Maggie was alone; she felt weary, too tired and worn out to think, and stood listlessly leaning against the window gazing upon that most dreary of prospects, a London back garden. When Mrs Grey came in hastily and unexpectedly, both stood silent and embarrassed—at last Mrs Grey advanced and, tossing her head, explained with a bad attempt at boldness, 'Well! I hope you are satisfied with the mischief you have made between your uncle and me.'

'I have made none,' returned Maggie sadly. 'He gave me the letter, and I returned it. I did not say one word to him.'

Mrs Grey was evidently relieved and even touched.

'Oh!' she cried, with more feeling than she usually displayed, 'you do not know what trouble I have been in about Tom! He has such bad companions; they lead him into no end of mischief! He owes a bill to a cigar shop in Crawford Street, and they threaten to nab him, or come to his father, and your uncle could just as well pay the national debt. So I never said a word about it, and now this money came just in the nick of time—and I thought you would not mind. I am so sorry I was so tempted, Maggie, and'——

'Oh, don't!' cried Maggie, lifting and outstretching her hands, as if to repel an apology. 'You are quite welcome to anything of mine, only you might have asked me, aunt. Never say another word about it.'

'Well, I won't if you don't wish it,' returned Mrs Grey, with rather the air of making a concession. 'But if you like we'll change the dress, and I'll get you a better one. There were some sweet things at twelve and nine—and you will not mention anything to your uncle?'

'Oh, no! I would not for the world. Now, aunt, I am weary. My head aches! You will not mind my going to bed? You see I am unused to sit up so late at night.'

'Yes, yes. Go to bed if you like.'

* * * * *

The next morning Mrs Grey was unusually mild, and Mr Grey, infinitely relieved to perceive that she and Maggie had 'made it up,' was too happy to ask any questions. Tom, too, was relieved from his most pressing difficulty, and consequently amiable to all. In

short, one of those moments of respite had come to them which occasionally visit all—without which the affairs of life would come to a dead lock.

After breakfast Mrs Grey whispered Maggie that she had better go and change the dress, putting the munificent sum of five shillings into her hand at the same time.

Maggie coloured. She would rather have rejected the offering—but that would have been both foolish and unkind. So she started on her errand, too young not to be cheered by the prospect of a new dress—and to choose it herself! though she felt a little diffident at going into a shop on her own account, albeit she had often bought not injudiciously on commission for her aunt. Her choice was soon made—a neat black and white dress of somewhat better texture. And then, to her delight, she found she had enough money left to buy a pair of gloves also—black, stitched with white.

On her return with these treasures she was summoned to Mrs Berry.

She found that lady *en déshabille* arranging some papers, and burning letters—her breakfast things not yet removed—a milliner's basket at one end of the room, and a dress, a lace scarf, and sundry other *confections*, as our neighbours across Channel call them, scattered about.

'Well, my dear,' she cried, as Maggie entered, 'you are looking quite another thing to-day! Why, you look almost pretty when you have a colour. Just help me to burn this heap of letters. All these are to go—and while you are doing that, I'll be tying all these up. What has your aunt been about to-day? Have you managed to change the dress yet?'

'Oh, yes! my aunt has been very kind about it, and given me more money to buy a better one. May I show it to you when I have done this? I should like your opinion.'

'Yes, to be sure, you must fetch it. And now, Maggie, I've something to tell you that will set you wild! You see I have felt it lonely travelling with only a maid—and then you can't take a maid to balls and places where you must not go alone. So I consulted Mr Dunsford, and decided to have a companion—and *you* shall be the companion, if you like to come!'

Maggie bounded to her feet with a cry of delight, and seized Mrs Berry's hand. 'Like to go with you! Oh! how good of you to think of me. It is more than I can believe.'

'Yes! I know that it is a great up-rise for you,' said Mrs Berry

with an air of importance, 'and I hope you will behave accordingly. I suppose your uncle will make no difficulties?'

'Oh! no, I should think not,' said Maggie, a little less rapturously as she thought of the kind, helpless man, 'but we must ask him.'

'Of course,' said Mrs Berry, 'why, you are not of age—eh? how old are you?'

'I shall be eighteen in May.'

'Well, you have not asked me what wages—I mean salary—you are to have.'

'No, indeed! I am sure I am not worth much! I leave all that to you.'

'Certainly, you are inexperienced; and though I have a good income, I have many demands upon it. You see I go out a good deal and I like my things to be fresh and nice—so that any one with a little management might be handsomely dressed in what I leave off. Now I shall always give you the best of my things—and then, that you may buy gloves and shoes, and not be without a penny in your pocket, I shall give you to begin with—shall we say twelve pounds a year?—that's a whole pound a month.'

'Oh, Mrs Berry, whatever you like! That seems like riches to me.'

'Well, my dear, the sooner I can see your uncle and aunt and settle the whole thing the better—for I must leave in a week.'

'But what can I do in return for all this?' cried Maggie, striving to see through the confusion of her own mind, as joy and gratitude and a sense of release struggled in her heart—and to understand what service would be required from her.

'Oh! not much! You must keep my accounts, and look to the housekeeping (and mine is a small matter), and—and write little notes for me (I don't mind mentioning to you, that I was a very delicate child, and my education a good deal neglected), and then you will assist me in needlework—dressmakers are such awful robbers! Can you darn well?'

'Oh yes! I am sure I ought.'

'And then you will be just like a sister with me, and you must behave like a lady. Don't mention the shop, or your uncle, or anything about this place. I shall always speak of you as the granddaughter of the Reverend somebody (your grandfather was a clergyman you tell me)—what was his name?'

'Oh! the Reverend Julius Everard.'

'Quite aristocratic, I declare! I dare say we shall manage very well. Now go and call your uncle to me.'

'I had better call my aunt,' said Maggie, a little nervously, and changing colour at this sudden fulfilment of her threats and wishes the day before, and filled with strange, utterly unexpected regret, at the idea of so soon quitting the wretched home, that yesterday seemed a miserable prison; then she knew no one and nothing beyond, and it contained the only being on earth to whom her heart clung, her careless, kindly, improvident uncle. Even Tom and her aunt, at that moment, seemed tolerable. But young and inexperienced though Maggie was, she was yet conscious that these feelings were a mere surface disturbance; that under all was the conviction that Mrs Berry's proposition was a glorious chance for emancipation and new life. And even while all these ideas flashed across her mind, she said, 'And will you speak to my aunt all at once?'

'To be sure I shall! Do you think that *I* am afraid of her?' replied Mrs Berry, with a laugh of conscious strength and wealth. 'And of course she will be glad to get rid of you, for I dare say it's no joke to have another woman's child to feed and clothe. Run away, like a good girl, and send her to me. I want to go out at two; if you had anything decent to put on, you might come with me, and begin to be useful at once. Go and fetch your aunt.'

'You do not want *me* back, I suppose?' asked Maggie.

'No, not at all.'

Infinitely relieved at this leave of absence, Maggie ran downstairs. Very pale, and with an unsteady voice, she addressed her aunt, whom she found overhauling the kitchen utensils and belongings, previous to an almost monthly change of servant 'girls.' She was considerably 'blacked' and very cross.

'Why, what's the matter?' she asked, struck with Maggie's looks and voice. 'She's never been and got into difficulties, and wants to go away without paying the week's rent?'

'Oh, no!—something you will like much better than that.'

'But I am not fit to be seen! Give me a little hot water, and the round towel, Augusta' (to the servant). 'I wish she had chosen any other time.'

'Well, she is rather in a hurry'—

'Then she must stop till I am ready. What is it about, Maggie?' insinuatingly, for her curiosity began to stir.

But Maggie was gone. So putting herself a little to rights by

the aid of a 'broken mirror,' which certainly made many images of *one* that was, and muttering that Maggie might have waited a little, Mrs Grey made herself presentable, and ascended into the 'drawing-room.'

She was closeted with Mrs Berry for the better part of an hour; and then, with a grave and thoughtful face, went in search of her husband, who presently, with a puzzled expression, followed her to the widow's presence, and the door was shut.

* * * * *

Dinner passed almost in silence on that important day at No. 9, Beverly Street, but at last Mrs Grey spoke:

'So you are going to leave us, Miss Maggie?'

'Leave us!—Maggie going!' screamed Bell and Jemima in a breath.

'That is as you and my uncle please,' replied Maggie gently, and flushing crimson.

'Why, yesterday you were ready to be off anywhere to get away from such a disagreeable lot,' said her aunt spitefully.

Maggie made no reply, but meeting her aunt's eyes, the latter coloured in her turn, and remained silent for a moment or two, while a torrent of questions poured from the younger branches.

'My! how nice!' cried Bell, when she had learned the main facts of the case. 'Maybe she will adopt you, like the Marchioness and Floribella in the "Poacher's Daughter."'

'At any rate, you'll travel about and have lots of fun,' grumbled the sharper Jemima.

'Hooray!' cried Dick, 'I'll not be obliged to carry up that lumbering old lamp any more.'

Maggie was ashamed of the pang she felt at this speech.

'Hold your tongues,' said the mother. 'It is all very fine, but the fact and truth of the matter is this: Maggie is going out as a sort of upper servant for twelve pounds a year and her missus's old clothes—that's all I can make out of it; and of all the selfish, close-fisted women ever *I* came across that Mrs Berry's the closest! Why, when your uncle' (to Maggie, whose eyes were full of tears at this insulting definition of her brilliant prospects), 'when your uncle asked her about travelling expenses, in case anything went wrong between you (not that *he'd* have troubled his head about it, if I hadn't put him up to it), there was no getting a syllable out of her beyond a promise that, if she sent you away within a year she would pay your way back. After that, she said, you ought to lay

by money. Lay by, indeed! out of twelve pounds a year! And I say, pa' (her usual appellation for Mr Grey), 'wasn't she sharp upon me for asking her to give it in writing?'

'Well, my dear, I wish you had not mentioned it. Maggie, my child, are you perfectly content to go with this lady? You are not induced to do it from any feeling that you are a burden upon me? For I look on you as a daughter, and, indeed, I have ever found you a dutiful and affectionate one, and a comfort to your old uncle.'

'Dearest, kindest, best uncle!' cried Maggie warmly, with much emotion, 'it breaks my heart to leave you, and yet it is better I should go. You have enough on your hands without me; you have done enough for me;' and, with the tears in her eyes, she put her arms round his neck, to the manifest and imminent peril of his cup and saucer, and the proper position of his glasses.

'Some people don't go to the play for nothing,' muttered Mrs Grey, as with much presence of mind she removed the crockery out of danger.

'Remember,' said Mr Grey, wiping his eyes with a blue and white spotted cotton pocket-handkerchief, 'remember, Maggie, you have a home always with me.'

'That's as long as you have one yourself,' said Mrs Grey coolly. 'And now, how are you to find that stock of clothes Mrs Berry talked of and you agreed to, as if your pockets were lined with gold? She bargains, Maggie, that we set you up with a wardrobe, and then you are to cost us nothing more.'

'Oh, aunt!' cried Maggie, pained beyond measure to be thus the bone of contention between her benefactors, and humiliated by a sense of her own helplessness; 'let me speak to Mrs Berry—I am sure she will not keep uncle to such a promise. I will explain to her——and then,' checking herself, 'I have that beautiful new dress, and'——

'Well,' interrupted Mr Grey, in a tone of strong common sense, 'there's John's present——that will go far to supply all she wants; and every penny of it must of course be laid out on Maggie.'

'Yes, yes, dear uncle, my aunt and I will see to that,' cried Maggie.

Mrs Grey was silent, and soon after rose from the table saying, hastily, 'I suppose you are all done?'

That was an afternoon of great excitement in the chemist's house. Jemima and Bell were with difficulty chased away to school, and

Dick took an early opportunity to coax Maggie out of three halfpence for toffee—on the strength of the splendid prospects opening before her.

It was close on tea-time before Mrs Berry sent for Maggie again. She had been out the whole afternoon, and spent it agreeably, to judge from appearances.

'Well, it's all settled, I suppose?' she said, as Maggie entered. 'So you shall have your tea with me. I have brought in some cold ham and a brown loaf; and I am as hungry as a hawk, so run down, like a good girl, and see why they don't send up the kettle.'

The widow evidently considered her already in her service. Maggie readily obeyed, and brought up the kettle herself, the servant following with the tea-things.

'That's right,' said Mrs Berry, who was trying to get a spot of mud off her velvet mantle. Maggie quickly folded up her costly garments, set out the tea-table, roused the fire, and made the tea, sitting down opposite her new friend with a bright face.

'Well now, this *is* comfortable,' said the widow, helping herself to ham and pushing the dish over to Maggie. 'Can you cut bread-and-butter?'

'I should think I could,' returned Maggie laughing, having cut all that has been used in this house for the last three years.'

'I wonder you have a finger left! It is a thing I never could do. Ah! what a life you must have had! Of all the selfish narrow sort of women I ever met, that aunt of yours is the worst. She'd skin a flint! Fancy her wanting me to give her a written promise to pay your expenses home, and give her compensation if I parted with you before two years. Catch me writing anything, indeed! But I dare say we will keep together pretty steady. I am one of that sort of affectionate creatures as can't abide being by myself. Why it's quite a comfort even to see you sitting opposite to me, and to think that I shall be able to send you of a message when it's too bad to go out myself, or get you to bring me up a cup of tea in the morning if I have headache. Fill me out another now, will you? Put in three lumps of sugar. Isn't the London milk awful? But you never knew any better, I suppose?'

'Oh, yes, at home, at Altringham, we had cream always.'

'Help yourself, and when you have done we will go into my room. I have a box full of things—some I thought of selling. We'll just look them over, and see what can be made of use to you. I talked of making your uncle rig you out at first, which would only

be fair to me. But law! he has no money—you might wait long enough before you could get a rag from him. Something that aunt of yours shall do though if it was only half a dozen pairs of stockings.'

A delightful couple of hours ensued, during which the work of selection was carefully performed. Various were the valuables displayed—black silk and coloured merino dresses, white muslins, cloth and silk mantles, an old waterproof—some considerably worn. Many were the scruples of the widow. 'You see,' she said, 'I expected a good deal for this lot, for the good would have carried the bad; but I think it will pay better to make some up for you.' After a few moments' thoughtful turning of them about, Mrs Berry exclaimed, 'There, take them all, and these bonnets; but you must pick me off the lace. Now I expect you are clothed for a year; and mind you are smart and nice by Saturday week, for I am going to Dover, and you have only ten days before you.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE week which succeeded this important move in the game of poor Maggie's simple life was a mixture of toil and excitement, not a little exhausting. Maggie worked early and late to accomplish the ladylike appearance insisted on by Mrs Berry. Mrs Grey caught something of the prevailing fever, and made a show, which sometimes became reality, of assisting. She was not a little surprised by the sort of discomfort she experienced at the impending loss of Maggie. She knew she should never again find so intelligent, so honest, so helpful a servant as the orphan girl had been to her; and though constantly annoyed by the sorrow her husband openly expressed at the approaching separation, she could not resist a certain kindly feeling, that mingled with and mellowed the curious medley of jealousy, satisfaction, anger, and remorse, revolving in her mind like a coil of writhing serpents. So she not unwillingly contributed her quota to her niece's preparations.

Bell and 'Jemimar' too insisted on hindering progress, under the plea of helping; while Tom was unpleasantly facetious, drawing

very unflattering word-pictures of Maggie's future, ending usually by her marriage with some gouty old citizen 'of credit and renown,' and her sending unlimited 'fivers' to her affectionate cousin.

Once Uncle Grey had broke forth in an alarming mood. He rushed in from the shop one evening in a state of much excitement. 'We have been most negligent, Mrs G.,' he said, "most culpably careless, Margaret! But fortunately Mr Shepherd has suggested caution before it is too late. Who is this Mrs Berry, to whom we are about to confide our poor girl? No one knows. She may be an angel, or the vilest of the vile; and, as Mr Shepherd says, the chances are in favour of the last. Moreover'——

'You just tell Mr Shepherd to mind his own business, and pay his account," cried Mrs Grey. 'Who is Mrs Berry, indeed! Who is *he?* Set him up, with his beggarly science, interfering with what don't belong to him! And you, too—I suppose you'll go next, and ask Mrs Berry who she is, and have Maggie thrown back on our hands, to say nothing of spoiling the poor child's fortunes. I am just the most unlucky woman on earth, to be worried with your nonsense!'

'No, my dear, no! I am not about to do anything rash! but some inquiries I will make, and I take shame to myself that I never thought of doing so before.'

'Well you have mulled it rather,' said Tom, with a view to 'rile' all parties; and a sharp discussion ensued as to what steps should be taken in this important matter.

At length Maggie seized a momentary lull to suggest that Mrs Berry's solicitors might answer any questions satisfactorily.

'Who are they?' asked Mr Grey, despondingly.

'Messrs Dunsford and Thorne. And Mr Dunsford is Mrs Berry's friend,' returned Maggie.

'Where is their office?'

'Oh, in Church Court, King Street.

'I will go there to-morrow,' said the chemist stoutly.

'And make a fool of yourself, I'll go bail,' said his wife. So the subject dropped temporarily, and seemed forgotten by all but Maggie, who dreaded some unexpected stroke of ill luck would deprive her of the golden chance fortune had thrown in her way.

However, a couple of evenings after Mr Grey came in, cold but radiant, and announced triumphantly that he had been to the City, had seen Mr Dunsford, a most gentlemanly man, who appreciated

his motives, and gave him a perfectly satisfactory account of the widow and her antecedents. Moreover he promised to say nothing to his fair client of the application, which it was but right of Mr Grey to make; and beyond this, Uncle Grey had been told that 'Dunsford and Thorne' was a firm of the highest respectability and universally known.

* * * * *

At length all was accomplished, and the day on which Maggie was to set out—like the prince in the fairy tale—to seek her fortune, arrived. It was a damp cold morning, with a depressing drizzle. Maggie was up early, and provided Mrs Berry with the desired cup of tea before she rose; an attention which drew from that lady an exclamation of 'Now this *is* nice!' and then she was enjoined to get the book of cab fares and look out the exact fare to London Bridge Station.

From that hour to the moment of starting the whole house was in an uproar. Mrs Berry had decided to leave by an early train. 'We can then get rooms before dinner,' she said, 'instead of going to any of those horrid hotels, where they would take the very skin off your back with their charges.' Previous to starting she had to revise, remonstrate, and discharge both Mr and Mrs Grey's accounts—an agonising passage to Maggie. She had, moreover, to make frequent spasmodic frantic rummages in every drawer and cupboard, lest by chance a stray atom of her property might be left behind. Then she had to count her gold and silver, that she might know exactly what was in her purse, and stow away a neat crisp roll of notes in some mysterious inner pocket, near the region of the heart. Finally she peeped into a little basket of provisions, and inspected Maggie severely.

That young lady had already scrutinised herself with much satisfaction, for the glass (and it was in Mrs Berry's large glass, mark you, she contrived to look) presented a very nice picture of a slight lady-like girl, in a pretty violet merino dress, a grey cloth cloak with a graceful hood, a neat simple bonnet of black lacé and violet ribbon, just enlivened by a few pansies of a lighter tinge, cuffs, collar, gloves—all complete; and under the bonnet a fair fresh young face, with a sparkle of hope in the blue-grey eyes, that would have been too light but for the plentiful shading of brown lashes many tints darker than her hair.

At last Maggie felt she had left the humiliation of her Cinderella chrysalis state behind, and almost smiled at the consciousness that

'eady she had thrown off the depression, the painful self-distrust, at always hangs upon shabbiness.

Poor child ! for her the future had no fear, so little did she dream e present sunshine should ever be overcast.

''Pon my word ! but you *do* look smart !' cried Mrs Berry, when e had time to examine her *protégée*. 'My goodness gracious, w well my merino and old grey cloak look ! And the bonnet ! ou made it yourself ? I expect you to turn out many a smart e for me. Goodness, Maggie, what a lucky girl you are ! Why, u look as nice and lady-like—as—as—,' running a-ground for a mile. 'Never mind—and don't say a word about the shop ! You ight be a lord's daughter for all that ill-natured Selina Salter all ever know. Now I think I have remembered everything—the b is at the door. Run down, say good-bye, and come after me. ere, take the little basket and umbrellas. I'll take the travel- g bag.'

So Maggie ran down to the well-known back parlour, where the hole family were assembled round the neglected breakfast table. sty adieux were exchanged, and even Tom had the audacity t to swear that Maggie was the 'spiciest gal' he had seen for uy a day, and then to ask for a kiss, which even in that supreme nent was indignantly refused.

'od bless you, Mag !' said her uncle.

'What a grand lady, to be sure ! You are ever so much too fine he back parlour of a shop,' said her aunt.

'e sure you write, Maggie, and tell us all about everything,' Bell and Jemima.

'ell, Mrs Berry, there she is. I commit her to your care. She ng and inexperienced,' began Mr Grey, with some solemnity. put his niece in the cab.

right,' said the lively widow. 'Tell the man London , and to drive quick.'

nother instant her uncle, the shop, with its well-known be s, vanished ; and when Maggie again saw them, all things ome new to her ; life, interior and exterior—all had been d altered by the transmuting force of experience.

't get you to buy the tickets yet,' said Mrs Berry ; 'but come in with me, and just see about it and the luggage. y three boxes and the small hamper, and your box, that's ther. You must see them labelled as soon as I get the There's nothing to pay. We have no more luggage than

we are entitled to, for I always go first class,' added the widow loftily.

Maggie listened in silence. She was engaged watching the well-known park, where she had wandered many a weary hour in charge of Bell and Jemima, oppressed by the sense of her own and their painful shabbiness, and that she was a creature apart and infinitely lower than the well-dressed, well-cared-for children, with their refined voices and subservient attendants, little fortune's favourites, who abound in that aristocratic haunt.

On reaching the terminus there was nearly a quarter of an hour to spare, which Mrs Berry employed in confiding her belongings to a porter, and seeing them piled on a truck in readiness for labelling, which charge the man undertook readily and civilly, seeing a perspective of sixpences, as the widow was splendidly attired in silk and furs, and spoke with an air of command; but Maggie could not help noticing when they were seated in the carriage the man came, touched his cap, put in the umbrellas and wraps, and said the luggage was 'all right, forrard in the guard's van,' that he retired with a disappointed look, despite Mrs Berry's profuse acknowledgments.

'Greedy, grasping lot they are, to be sure,' said she, as they moved out of the station and she was busy settling herself. 'They all want to be paid for their trouble, in spite of the notices the Company put up; but,' (in a high principled tone) 'I never encourage it. Well, Maggie, isn't this nice? Did you ever travel first class before?'

'No, never,' returned Maggie smiling, 'and it is very nice.'

Then, the speed and clatter increasing, Mrs Berry opened a Morning Paper, under the friendly cover of which she speedily dozed off. Not so Maggie. Every sense was at its fullest stretch. The rapid motion—the total newness of her present circumstances—the swift-changing scene viewed from the window of the carriage—all was excitement to her. Then she recalled her last sad journey, when she left behind her all she had ever known of love or life in the dear gray old town of Altringham, and journeyed painfully with her uncle to London, where her worst anticipations were fulfilled by the wretchedness of her life—for at first it was much more intolerable. Use hardened her; and, moreover, naturally loving and generous, though a trifle fiery, it was not possible for those who lived with her to dislike her. Now all was so different. How could she ever do enough for Mrs Berry? She wished.

though, that lady would not be quite so fussy and ready to squabble with cab-drivers. Maggie could not help thinking that the sixpenny-worths of saving were dearly bought by the coarse rough words they drew forth from the aggrieved drivers. But no doubt such fancies were a mistake, and only the result of her ignorance. So she sat and gazed from the carriage window with undiminished delight—sometimes giving a tender thought to her uncle—to the old den of a back parlour—even a sort of plenary absolution to her aunt. And while she mused, Mrs Berry enjoyed quite a refreshing nap.

The widow's history is a short and simple tale. Her father had contrived in the course of his professional career—which profession was a mystery—to scrape together money enough to furnish a good class of house. He let the greater part of it in lodgings. His daughter kept it for him cleverly and pleasantly. Their most permanent and best-paying inmate, a gray and slightly dried-up elderly gentleman of the most regular habits, astonished her one day as she was rendering the week's account (always written out in clerkly style by her father), by proposing for her. Albeit addicted to penny romances and a beau-ideal husband—something between a black whiskered dummy in the window of the neighbouring hair-dresser and a handsome policeman who occasionally frequented the street—the solid attractions of Mr Berry proved too strong to be rejected; and having silenced her father's inquiries by a reference to Dunsford and Thorne, and a handsome sum not only settled upon her but fairly invested in their joint names, he bestowed his benediction and they were united.

After a few years of a very tranquil life, which Mrs Berry might have felt a little dull, but of which she was too much in awe of her husband to speak—he was seized one chill November day with a bad sore throat, and after a few days' illness breathed his last—to the terror and grief of his wife, who knew that she could not keep up the same almost luxurious though unpretending home on the proceeds of fifteen hundred pounds—and of his affairs beyond this she knew nothing.

Her surprise was therefore almost overpowering when, after reading the will to her in due form (by which her late husband bequeathed everything to her absolutely), Mr Dunsford gradually and solemnly revealed to her the existence of various sums, all well and safely invested, the income of which reached to something over one thousand a year; besides a comfortable balance at the

bank, the house and furniture, and sundry other bits of property.

Mrs Berry was half frightened at the idea of such wealth, and while her father lived, his homely warnings and admonitions, his terror of fortune hunters and painful sense of the responsibility money brought, made the widow's life a burden but kept her out of mischief. He, however, died before the second year of mourning was out.

Two years and a half had now elapsed since the deceased Berry had been laid in the grave, and the widow, free, rich, and greedy for enjoyment, had doffed her weeds, and incited by the counsels of her friends, the Salters, whom she met at a respectable boarding-house at Cheltenham, had tried a season at Boulogne and was intoxicated thereby, and now dreamed of nothing but conquests and pleasure.

At Tunbridge, Mrs Berry, who had spoken but little even after she had roused herself from her sleep, exclaimed cheerfully, 'Get the basket, Margaret (I shall call you Margaret—Maggie is so vulgar); let us have a sandwich and a glass of wine, for we will just leave the boxes and all that at the station, and settle about lodgings at once. Then we can come back for our things, and if we eat a bit now, a meat tea at five o'clock will do very well. There, take a little wine—it will do you good, for we have plenty to do. I am determined to have nice rooms. There is very nice society at Dover—lots of carriage people and military—and it will not do to have anything shabby. Another sandwich? It's rather dull having no one else in the carriage. I have heard of people picking up such nice acquaintance travelling'

'Yes, I have often heard of such things,' said Maggie, responding to any bit of romance—of which, in her own queer vulgar way, Mrs Berry had plenty.

Arrived at their destination, the widow speedily disposed of her belongings in the luggage office; and then, whispering 'No one knows us here yet,' hurried Maggie into one of the various omnibuses waiting, and they were soon moving along quickly, and Maggie experienced that peculiarly bewildering sensation of whirling through unknown streets—very mean, narrow, rugged streets—looking as though the houses were built of sea-worn pebbles, with a double portion of mortar. At length better houses appeared—they were in a more open locality—and then Mrs Berry called to the conductor to set them down at the corner of Waterloo Crescent.

When Maggie looked round her she was seized with a sudden delight. At each side stretched a long line of pleasant looking, low-roofed houses, green with *jalousie* blinds, and nestling under lofty cliffs, the white chalk peeping here and there through the growth of grass and ferns and brambles that covered them; the whole crowned by the grand half-decayed old castle, while in front stretched a wide bay with the open sea beyond. The day had cleared during their journey, and the blue waters were dimpling and splashing and heaving in the sunlight, while the long sweep of the shore was fringed with a constant line of white foam, where the gentle waves broke and played and raced away again, like mischievous children. Such an emblem of joyous brimming life Maggie never looked upon before, while the briny air, so soft, so invigorating, made every breath she drew delicious.

'Oh! Mrs Berry!' she cried, clasping the widow's hand, and stirred by some strange sympathy with the glowing animation of the scene, 'what a heavenly place! Why did you not tell me it was so beautiful?'

'Yes, it's nice, isn't it?' returned that lady unmoved. 'But look round—do you see any "Apartments?" Well, I declare, that is very extraordinary! Not a single card all along this row! Come, we'll walk on and see if we can't find something.'

They walked on quickly, for Mrs Berry could accomplish nothing without a fuss. Maggie little heeded her companion's babble; she was drinking in the beauty around her; she was receiving a new revelation of life's possibilities.

'There!' exclaimed Mrs Berry, excitedly, 'there's a card; there's another—no it's not. Why the place must be quite full. I thought it was out of season. But I fancy Dover is always the fashion. I am sure I am very glad I determined to come down here. Now mind, whenever I say, "What do you think of these rooms?" be sure you say, "Are they not very dear?" or "A high figure," or "They have not so good a look-out as what we saw lower down," or something like that, to back me up.'

So saying, without giving Maggie time to remonstrate, Mrs Berry rang the bell and plunged into the fray. This was rather a trial for Maggie—to sit and listen to Mrs Berry and the 'woman of the house' squabbling over each detail; first the exorbitant amount of rent, then the enormous charge for kitchen fire, the high price of coal per scuttle, the unconscionable demand for boot-cleaning, &c., &c., while her whole soul was out of doors, longing to feast uninter-

ruptedly upon the sights and sounds so new to her. Three or four times was this process gone through, as the widow's keen sight discovered various additional cards; at last considerably wearied, in spite of her energy, Mrs Berry threw herself on one of the seats on the Esplanade. 'Isn't it tiresome?' she cried. 'I declare I don't know what to do. Three pound ten is a lot of money, and those rooms in the Lawn are quite as good for a pound less.'

'But then it is round the corner, and has only a peep of the sea,' cried Maggie.

'That is quite true,' said the widow, with an air of the gravest consideration; 'it might seem mean to be in a corner, and lower us completely. We'll go back to that woman on the Marine Parade, and I'll make her an offer. I must say, Maggie, that you're no great help in making a bargain; but you'll improve. I'll just offer Mrs Cheetham three pounds a week everything included and give her a week's rent in advance if she likes.'

A prolonged chaffer ensued and the bargain was once more nearly off—for Mrs Cheetham stuck gallantly to her extras—when a lucky random hit on her part finished the affair. 'No, mum, I knows the real vally of my rooms and I will not underlet them—and so I says this morning to a lady as was wild to get them, only they were above her mark—and she a lady of title. Oh, dear, dear, whatever was her name? Lady—Lady Salter—that's it.'

'Oh, indeed!' cried Mrs Berry, her eyes sparkling. 'Come, Mrs Cheetham, let us meet each other—say three pound fifteen, all extras included. I'll take the rooms certain for a month, and here is a week's rent down.'

'I couldn't think of such a thing, mum, from a lady of your appearance. But of course you'll pay for your own coals and washing table linen when you has company?'

'Very well then,' said Mrs Berry gaily, 'it's settled then, and I will send for my boxes. We will have tea as soon as I get them.'

'Would not the young lady like to see her room? It is just over yours, see—only small,' said the landlady very politely to Maggie.

'I wish you could give her one on the same floor as mine.'

'Well, mum, you see, if I break the suite, I must charge according—and the little room above is very pretty.' Maggie returned after a very rapid inspection, perfectly satisfied, for her little chamber looked upon the sea.

'Now as I am fairly dead beat,' said Mrs Berry, 'let me see,

Margaret, if you are woman of business enough to go and get our luggage.'

CHAPTER V.

THE week which ensued was cold and wet, and proved not a little disenchanting to Maggie. The sea, it was true, was always interesting, though sometimes awesome and stern of aspect; but then to be shut up with Mrs Berry in the same house was not a little trying—arranging her clothes, and making Maggie contrive some alterations thereon, and having her hair dressed in various styles, helped her through a couple of days; but then she became a severe infliction. Uneducated, limited in capability, with enough imagination of a physical description to crave constantly after excitement, and without an object in life save self, Mrs Berry's mental calibre offered few resources, and the 'whole duty' of Maggie, in her patroness's opinion, was to be admiring and amusing. The first part she fulfilled fairly, for she was so honestly grateful to her protectress that she seemed handsome and clever and a grand lady in her eyes.

It was rather a relief to Maggie to be sent out in wind and rain, on sundry errands—to market and to shop; and towards the end of the week a grand diversion was caused by a visit from Lady and Miss Salter.

The former a huge woman, who waddled when she walked, and generally wore a rich velvet or silk cloak, which flew out in ample folds from the shoulders; she also wore a large double eye-glass with gold rims, attached to a gold chain so massive that it suggested touching reminiscences of the deceased Sir Benjamin Salter, late alderman of 'famous London Town.' Miss Salter was as thin as her mother was stout, and was severely genteel. To be refined, correct, aristocratic in manner and bearing, was the aim of her existence, and as well-sustained effort usually brings success, she produced a very tolerable imitation of the style she admired. Both ladies were well and carefully dressed, and brought a strong odour of musk with them into the room.

Maggie, who had been altering what Mrs Berry termed 'a thirty shilling bonnet,' that does not look 'one quarter as well as that little one you made out of my old things,' was hustled away, lace, flowers, ribbon, &c., gathered up in her apron, with an injunction to make herself nice and be back in five minutes.

She was formally introduced as 'My young friend, Miss Grey,' and quietly sat down to her crochet work; but she was soon roused by a series of cleverly put leading questions. How did she like Dover? Was she fond of the sea? Did it agree with her? Maggie smilingly replied that all places agreed with her; but that she was delighted with the sea; her own home having been quite inland, she had never seen it before.

'Indeed!' said Lady Salter. 'And where might that be?'

'At Altringham,' replied Maggie, to Mrs Berry's infinite delight, as it was a safe remote place.

'Oh, indeed!' said Miss Salter languishingly. 'And do you know the Dean? He is a very charming person.'

'I knew the late Dean. Ah! what a good man he was!' Miss Salter was silenced, for the present Dean, a Low Churchman, of very obscure origin, was but newly appointed by Whig, not to say Radical interest, whereas the late Dean was a highly connected moderately High Churchman. Maggie spoke out of the fulness of her heart, remembering that dignitary's kindness to her mother, little dreaming the effect her words produced. Her cross-examination proceeded no further; the Salters, mother and daughter, decided that the widow Berry had picked up some offshoot of decayed gentility, and felt annoyed accordingly; for they had looked upon the widow as their special property, though they had found her not so malleable in matters which involved expense, even during her stay at Boulogne, where she was quite in their hands.

'I am surprised, Mrs Berry, that you can be without a piano, you were coming on so nicely with your singing,' said Miss Salter.

'Oh! I intend to have one, but the weather has been so bad there was no getting out. How did you know I was here?'

'We saw your name among the arrivals,' said Lady Salter.

'Indeed!' cried Mrs Berry (her eyes sparkling). 'I wonder how they found me out.'

'Your landlady of course put it in; they always do it, as an advertisement for these people. Dover is rather dull just now,' continued her ladyship, 'but we know a few very nice people—Mrs Colonel Waddilove and the Cruickshanks. Mr C. is a man of very

good family, and holds a high appointment, quite confidential with the government' (he was a queen's messenger), 'and they know Major Tupper, and several of the military stationed here—so that we make up a nice little rubber of an evening. Now this is a charming room for a little card and musical party.'

'Ah! I dare say; but where are the people to come from?' returned Mrs Berry a little discontentedly.

'Oh! they will come,' said Lady Salter encouragingly. 'My friend, Mrs Colonel Waddilove, has a little reception next week, and if you would like to come I should be very happy to take you.'

'I am sure you are very good; you never forget me,' cried the widow gratefully. 'I shall be very pleased indeed. What shall I wear?'

'Full dress and jewels,' returned Lady Salter, pompously.

'And what sort of party is it?—what are we to do?' persisted Mrs Berry anxiously, quite in a flutter of excitement. 'Is it dancing or what?'

'Dancing! Oh dear, no!' said Miss Salter. 'Music, cards, and conversation.'

'Very nice, I am sure, but I *do* like dancing,' said the widow with a sigh.

'I regret that I do not feel at liberty to take more than one friend, Miss Grey,' observed Lady Salter stiffly, 'or I should be happy to introduce you.'

'Oh! never mind,' cried Mrs Berry; 'young girls like her only care for dancing.'

Maggie smiled, but said nothing. 'Music, cards, and conversation,' did not appear very attractive under the protecting influence of Lady and Miss Salter. They sat a considerable time, but as the conversation turned on people and events at Boulogne, or, as all three pronounced it, 'Bullone,' Maggie was little interested. She listened dreamily, as one character after another was torn to pieces, and thought in her own mind how really vulgar Mrs Berry's fine friends were. Maggie was a foolish young thing, with high-flown notions, partly innate, partly drawn from her favourite authors—Bulwer and Scott and Miss Edgeworth, whose works were among poor Uncle Grey's few private treasures. Fine company for a young creature not worth twopence! Oh glorious Communism of literature! that permits a poor little friendless girl in a London back parlour to cull the choicest fruits of minds so rich, observation so keen to thrive upon such rare food! So Maggie sat, and

listened, and thought. At last the visitors took leave, and then Mrs Berry broke forth:

'Miss Salter is very elegant, is not she? and so is her mother; but they are just selfish and knowing! Oh, I shan't forget how Miss S. left me in the lurch, after me taking places at the play! Still it is very kind of them to take me to this party. But I declare, you are a little brick, Maggie! You did answer her ladyship well. Who was that great man you were talking about—dean, or deacon, or something? You *are* a brick!'

'Oh, the Dean of Altringham—Dean Jocelyn! He was a very kind friend to my poor dear mother. I believe he knew my grandfather; and I know when my mother was ill he used to send her fruit from the Deanery gardens, and wine, but it was all no use,' concluded Maggie dejectedly.

'No, of course not,' replied Mrs Berry unheeding. 'I tell you what, Maggie, I must get a piano, and practise my singing. I may be asked to sing on Wednesday. Can you play?'

'I know the notes—scarce anything more. I used to learn when I was at school, but since I went to my uncle's I have forgotten all I ever knew.'

'Now that is a pity. I thought you might be able to play my accompaniments. I can sing, fast enough, but the playing *is* a bother; and yet I practised enough all last year at Boulogne, and I had such a nice master! I suppose there is a music master to be had here?'

'Of course,' said Maggie.

'Well, let us put on our bonnets, and go see about the piano and a master at once. You might pick it up again, just sitting in the room listening, for it would not be correct for me to take my lesson alone, you know.'

'Would it not?' said Maggie, wondering.

'Come along, Maggie,' cried Mrs Berry, 'it is not raining now, and I can look in at Lavington's and see if they have any nice new head-dresses at the same time.'

'Oh, dear Mrs Berry! you have such heaps of pretty things for your head, and then all your hair.'

'I declare you are a prudent little thing, and will save my money for me,' said Mrs Berry, in high good humour.

This movement was a source of great pleasure to Maggie, for hoping to be saved trouble, the widow permitted her various stray half hours to practise, and she soon felt her own knowledge of

music returning, though her fingers were for a long time stiff and unmanageable.

The days which intervened between Lady Salter's visit and Mrs Colonel Waddilove's reception passed quickly, for they were fully employed.

Various alterations had to be made in the decorations of the two evening costumes, between which Mrs Berry's choice vibrated. Then an equal variety of head-dresses were tried on, and that too at the most unexpected and unsuitable hours of the day. Then there were practisings, at which Maggie was always expected to assist, and during which, in her honest regard and gratitude, she would frequently exclaim, 'I do not think that sounds right, Mrs Berry,' as the widow uttered some discordant shriek; for, though gifted with a very fair quality of voice, she was woefully deficient in ear.

As the momentous hour approached, Mrs Berry grew more anxious about her dress and appearance.

'Don't I look horrid thin and pale? Shall I put on—just the least bit in the world?' making a motion as though to touch her cheeks.

'Oh, no, no! pray do not! There is nothing like a natural complexion; yours suits your eyes and hair. When you get into a warm room your colour will come,' cried Maggie.

'Well, perhaps so, but I am afraid my hair looks too plain—only just the ivy leaves and a rose.'

'I think it looks *so* nice! pray do not alter it!' implored Maggie, who had an artistic taste for dress.

'Well, I had better be off,' said Mrs Berry, 'for I am to take up her ladyship and Miss Salter. I don't know how it is, but I generally do take them up whenever we go out together. Good-bye—I dare say I shall not be late.'

For the first time for years Maggie had some hours absolutely and indisputably to herself, and proceeded to dispose of them according to a little plan she had made. First she set forth pen, ink, and thin paper, and began to indite an epistle to Cousin John—good, kind Cousin John. A very pretty pleasant letter it was; for, as she wrote, old memories thronged upon her, and she saw the large-limbed, loutish boy once more, who had been her staunch friend—she remembered how she had first looked down upon him—then how she had clung to him—then the agony of parting—and many a time she paused in her composition to think over past

trials, and wipe away the tears that would rise as she recalled them. And now, how fortunate she ought to consider herself! And no doubt she did; but nevertheless she could not resist a strange uneasy feeling, that, good and kind as she was, Mrs Berry did not suffice to fill her heart.

'Ah! if my own dear mother had been spared I should have wanted nothing more! But now, I wonder will any one ever love me, as Devereux loved Isola! I am afraid not. I am no beauty,' and she sighed to herself, and wished Cousin John was handsome and at all convertible to heroic purposes. But no! even her lively imagination could not transform the rugged, awkward boy, with his ragged-looking red hair, and not over clean hands, into a hero, to be worshipped with a life's devotion. So she resumed her pen and finished her letter. Then she luxuriated at the piano, picking out chords that harmonized with the sweet old hymns and ballads, still clearly remembered, with which her mother used to soothe her childhood and charm her older years.

Mrs Berry returned about one o'clock, tired and not over pleased. 'I declare,' she exclaimed, 'you look as fresh and bright as if you had the best of company, and I am quite fagged. I wish you would get me a bit of ham and a little hot brandy-and-water. I am quite cold and hungry.' Maggie ministered to her friend's wants, and, judiciously abstaining from unnecessary questioning, left her to reveal her wrongs. It was not till breakfast time the next morning that she spoke. 'I am sure, it was well worth dressing to go and meet about twenty old fogies, not one under sixty, I'm certain, except a Major Compton, a nice man enough, and Selina Salter would not give any one a chance to speak to him; but old Mrs Waddilove did introduce him at the last—and it's my belief he *asked* her. We did nothing for hours and hours but look at one another, and then one lady sung a song—a queer, doleful thing; then Miss Salter squalled out something; then we sat down to cards, and they gave me a horrid old creature, with red eyes and a wig, for a partner. He was awful cross, and played so bad himself that I lost fifteen shillings. What do you think of that? I could have cried to think of all that stupid, stuck-up party cost me. There was my bouquet, that was five shillings, and the fly will be five, and whist fifteen—that's twenty-five—and a pair of gloves, two and nine.'

'But they will clean,' suggested Maggie, consolingly.

'Well, I do not know about that,' returned the widow; 'all I can tell you is, that if I can get no more pleasure or profit out of

Dover than Mrs Colonel Waddilove's receptions I will just go straight away to Germany, or France, or somewheres.'

'It is certainly provoking,' said Maggie, with sympathy, yet finding something irresistibly comic in the widow's woes, and highly delighted at the idea of going to the Continent. 'It would be charming to go abroad.'

'Yes, it's twice as pleasant; but I must rub up my French a little—you can't think how fast I picked it up! You see it is awkward not to be able to read it. You can't do much in French?'

'Not much, I am sorry to say—a little more than in music.'

'Well, we will go and look out a master. I'll engage I'll get lessons in for you for the same money; and then we'll go abroad, when you can speak a little. But we'll keep the lessons quite quiet, and not let those ill-natured Salters know a word about it.'

'Oh, Mrs Berry! how good you are to me! How much I owe you!—to learn French and music—it is beyond all I had ever hoped for!' cried Maggie, colouring with pleasure, while her eyes sparkled.

'I declare, Maggie, you are a funny girl. Sometimes you look downright pretty. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if you picked up a husband one of these days!'

'Not at all likely,' said Maggie, laughing, 'for I do not intend to be easily pleased.'

'Set you up,' said Mrs Berry, laughing good-humouredly; 'you little know what a rarity a husband is, for a girl who has no money.'

The idea of a French master was acted on by Mrs Berry with her usual promptitude, and a little dried-up specimen of the Gallic race was soon discovered, who visited the widow and her young *protégée* two evenings in the week, to impart his language.

This period of her life with Mrs Berry was often remembered with a pleasant sense of repose and satisfaction by our young heroine, who enjoyed the study and full occupation. Certes, she had no lack of the latter, for, besides her own share of work, she had to get Mrs Berry's lessons into her head somehow, besides doing an infinite number of what the widow termed 'odd jobs' in the way of millinery and needlework. Then Mrs Berry, having procured admission to the library by a subscription, left the choice of books entirely to Maggie; and to crown all, the only presentable man whom she had met at Mrs Colonel Waddilove's reception, Major Compton, reappeared, and frequently walked with Mrs Berry and Miss Salter; while Mrs Waddilove's receptions became less dull

and more desirable; so that Maggie had considerably more time to herself—and dearly she valued it.

Nearly two months had thus flown away pleasantly and profitably to Mrs Berry's young friend, who felt as if they had been together for years, and that the purgatorial period of Beverly Street had been shunted away, miles back, upon life's line. April was closing with a bright fierce sun and a treacherous east wind, and Mrs Berry, in common with her fashionable friends, was absorbed in the anticipation of a grand military ball to be given by the gallant Blankshire Militia; for it was the time of the Crimean war, when few regular troops were to be found in our 'tight little island.'

The widow's demands on Maggie's sympathy, taste, invention, and endurance, were enormous. Nevertheless, she was equal to the occasion, and gallantly put aside the secret longing of her heart to go there herself, and dance to the inspiriting music of the band which occasionally delighted the ears of the good citizens of Dover.

However, fate ordained a different ending to Mrs Berry's preparations. Four days before the ball she was prostrated by a severe attack of fever and malignant sore throat, the result of a cold caught when walking on the pier in a charmingly airy costume. When the hour came at which she ought to have been dressing, two doctors, looking terribly grave, stood by the widow's bedside, and poor Maggie hung upon their accents with heartfelt grief and anxiety.

But Mrs Berry recovered; slowly and intermittently her strength returned, and when she was herself again the Salters had disappeared, Mrs Colonel Waddilove had vanished, and Major Compton with the gallant Blankshires, had departed to distant quarters.

'There is no use staying on here,' said Mrs Berry, 'everyone is gone. I'll tell you what, Maggie, we'll go away to some of those German baths—they will set me up, and the doctors say I ought to winter in Italy. Now, my dear, I sha'n't forget in a hurry the good care you have taken of me. See if I don't do you a good turn yet. You stick by me, Maggie, and you'll not repent it.'

So the widow and her *protégée*, considerably more drawn together than before, set forth upon their continental pilgrimage, and for a long time Maggie was lost to her Beverly Street kindred.

CHAPTER VI

A BRIGHT, though far from a warm sun, was lending its beautifying lustre to the gay streets and gardens of sparkling Paris (and that city is scarcely Paris without sunshine), one evening, as the days first began to lengthen, about a year and a half after the close of the last chapter. But few gleams of light were left in the gloomy depth of the courtyard on which the bed-chamber and smaller sitting-room windows of the Pension Favert opened. In front, the Pension Favert was one of the ornaments of the Rue Raymond—a short, wide, noisy street in the neighbourhood of the Madeleine. Here congregated widows with limited means, genteel aspirations, and marriageable daughters; enterprising spinsters; and the halt, the maimed and the blind of the stronger sex.

It was, of course, chiefly frequented by English, whose eccentricities were an endless source of wonder to the hostess, albeit long inured to insular singularities, which she the more contemned as the inmates of the *pension* by no means upheld the magnificent side of John Bull's character.

In one of the best and largest of the gloomy bed-rooms of the Pension Favert, this early spring evening, Maggie Grey sat beside a table on which lay numerous pieces of green silk and white lace, paper patterns, pins, cottons, and all the accessories which indicate the process of making something new out of something old. She looked a little pale and weary, as though she longed for a breath of free fresh air. Yet she worked on steadily, piecing morsels neatly together, and evolving something like shape and order out of the chaos before her. Presently she began to regulate and put away the fragments, and having cleared the table, walked to the window, and stood for a long time gazing down into the melancholy well-like courtyard, as though her thoughts were far away.

The eighteen months' wanderings which succeeded Mrs Berry's illness at Dover had developed almost another creature out of the dulled and sad dependent orphan—although to be Mrs Berry's companion was no brilliant lot. But a bright imagination, innate good taste, and a strong substratum of sound common sense could not fail to reap a large amount of education from summers in Ger-

many, an autumn in Florence, and a winter at Nice, for the restoration of Mrs Berry's health.

Nor was this period without a large share of pleasure, although Maggie was generally left out of all parties, expeditions, and amusements where her presence would entail the smallest additional cost. But galleries and churches and beautiful rambles cost nothing; and many chance acquaintances, of divers nationalities, at *tables d'hote*, made themselves agreeable to the fair, quiet English girl. Then she often had a respite from needlework, when she contrived to do a great deal of miscellaneous reading; and at Nice, when, in the previous spring, Mrs Berry made a hurried visit to Paris to see the Exhibition, because there was a party starting with an experienced leader, who undertook to carry them all through it at so much per head, Maggie was thus left desolate to wait her employer's return, she was enthusiastically patronised by an elderly American lady—an old maid, and reported enormously rich—who took her out driving, lent and gave her books, and finally made her a splendid offer to leave 'that horrid British woman' and live with her. But Maggie was far too faithful to be tempted for a moment, though she knew very well how uncertain was her hold of Mrs Berry. It was clear to her awakened powers of observation that the main object of the widow's wanderings, and untiring efforts after what she would have termed 'elegant society,' was a desire to buy some pinchbeck coronet with her solid gold. This inordinate desire for social distinction was dashed with a confused ideal of a handsome, charming, reformed rake of a husband devotedly attached to her—if a mind of Mrs Berry's calibre could form an ideal. And hitherto all her efforts had been unavailing. Nevertheless, though Maggie well knew she would be cut adrift remorselessly for the first decently glittering French count or German baron who thought it prudent to recruit his shattered fortunes from the widow's coffers—she steadily resisted the temptations of her American acquaintance, who ended her fruitless negotiations by quarrelling fiercely with their object, and cutting Mrs Berry dead when she returned from Paris, much to that lady's dismay—as she had a sincere adoration of wealth, almost touching in its undisguised simplicity.

'I'm sure you've been and done something awkward or stupid to put her out, Maggie. I'll tell you what, we'll go back to Baden

and Homburg, and try Florence again for the autumn. If I feel the cold much we'll finish the winter here, and then I'll try a regular season in Paris. I met some very nice Scotch people, who told me Paris is the right place for me. There's a mixture of French and English society, very pleasant and distinguished, to be had easy enough if you make a good appearance.'

So Maggie was swept away in her protectress's service, and did her best to avail herself of what opportunities of self-improvement offered. Rich with youth, hope, feeling, affection, she felt how grand a thing life is even under difficulties—and in spite of great natural patience and modesty she often ardently longed to have her full share of the bright things about her, which, almost within her grasp, were yet out of reach.

Maggie had thought long, vaguely, and not very cheerfully, when the door was dashed open, and Mrs Berry came in, with flushed cheeks and an eager look.

'Well, my dear, you must help me to dress at once, for I am invited to an elegant dinner at Véfour's and we are going to the 'Opéra Comique' after. I have had such a busy morning! I *am* tired. Just look in the *armoire*, like a good girl, and see if there is any of that Frontignac left, and a biscuit. I am nearly famished.'

'And who are you to dine with?' asked Maggie, as she set forth the desired refreshment with kindly alacrity.

'Oh! Mr and Mrs Maclaggan—*the* Maclaggan,' said Mrs Berry, correcting herself with a strong emphasis on the article. 'You know he is chief of something or other, and has great estates, or had—for they have been taken from him by some horrible rogue of a lawyer,' she continued; for save where self and pelf were concerned Mrs Berry was soft and credulous to an extraordinary degree, always ready to believe any penny periodical tale wherein love, murder, wrong, and robbery abounded. 'Mrs Maclaggan was telling me all about it—she is an elegant woman, and he is quite the gentleman.'

'He has such a dreadfully red face,' objected Maggie.

'Oh! that is exposure to weather—he was such a sportsman. Mrs Maclaggan says he was always chasing deer and things when they were at home in Glen—Glen——oh, bother the name! Never mind. Get me my black moire with the yellow trimming, and my black lace bonnet with gold convolvuluses. I think they become

me better than anything else I have—and I do want to look well. It is to be such a gay dinner!' cried the widow, hastily divesting herself of her morning dress.

'Who gives it?' asked Maggie, as she assisted her friend and patroness.

'Oh! two gentlemen; a Mr De Courcy Jones, and the Comte De Bragance—you remember him surely, at Baden?' cried Mrs Berry excitedly.

'No, I do not think I do. We saw so many counts and marquises.'

'But you could not mistake *him*. He is not very tall, but he has such splendid eyes, and such a figure, and such style! He was leaving just as we arrived! he was at the Maclaggan's the first time we took tea with them.'

'I think I do remember him. He played some game at cards with a Russian gentleman?'

'Yes that's him. Well, he came in to call while I was at Mrs Maclaggan's, and do you know he remembered me quite well—and said such flattering things! Nonsense, of course; though he looked as if he meant them. And then he said he and his friend, a young Englishman of fashion, wanted to give Mrs and Miss Maclaggan a little dinner, and begged me to join them. And then we agreed to go and hear Rose Chéri in the "Domino Noir" after. I am *so* glad I came to Paris!'

'Rose Chéri— in the "Domino Noir!"' sighed poor Maggie. 'Yes, that will be delightful.'

'Never mind. I'll take you some night; we'll go *incog.* to a cheap part of the house,' cried Mrs Berry, excited into an unwonted condition of generosity. 'Give me my blue enamel and diamond locket and earrings—and shall I put on just the least touch to my cheeks?'

'No, no! dear Mrs Berry, it is horrible; and you have quite a nice colour as it is.'

'Well, never mind then. But I forgot to tell you I have gone and engaged apartments—an awful rent, my dear; seven hundred francs a month. But they are uncommon nice, and I felt quite ashamed—the Count and Miss Maclaggan laughed so—at my living in a *pension*—a place only fit for dowagers and old maids, they said; not fit for any one with the least pretensions to fashion.'

'They ought to be very nice rooms indeed for such a rent,' said

Maggie, a little startled at this sudden outbreak of extravagance on the part of her friend.

'So they are—No. 2, Rue M——, just at the corner of the Champs Elysées, *au second*, but quite first rate. And I tell you what, Maggie; while I am out to-night, I wish you would just get Madame's account. I'll have to pay up to the end of next week. Never mind. Get everything made out. I'll settle up to-morrow and we'll be off.'

'What! move into your new apartments to-morrow?' cried Maggie, half frightened.

'Why not? I am sure I am quite ashamed to give my address here. So we'll have plenty to do to-morrow to find a *femme de ménage* and all sorts of things, for I think we shall be able to do without a regular servant, eh, Maggie? We must try, with such an awful rent. Now, I think I'll do. You would'nt advise the least touch—just a *soupçon?* No. I dare say you're right. Good-bye, child. You might amuse yourself looking over the book while I am out, and let me know in the morning exactly how much I have spent, travelling and all, in the last fortnight.'

So Mrs Berry went away exulting. Maggie stood awhile in deep thought; and then, with a look of some perplexity, set to work to put the confusion of finery Mrs Berry generally left behind her in order; this accomplished, there was just time enough to arrange her own very simple toilet before the dinner bell rang.

It was rather desolate going down-stairs alone, and taking her place among twenty strangers; but it would have been still more tremendous to send word she would *not* dine down-stairs; so Maggie went—and met with some kindly notice from a musically-inclined and slightly rheumatic bachelor, one of the pillars of the *pension*.

A couple of days saw the widow and her *protégée* almost settled in their new and very desirable lodgings. It was a modern house, fresh with paint and gilding, gay with bright chintz hangings, and mirrors, and clocks, and vases, luxurious with deep lounging chairs, sofas, and ottomans; a saloon all rose colour and gold; a *salle à manger* with oak furniture and bronzes. The house (a corner one) afforded a triangular closet, communicating with the saloon on one side, and a queer little kitchen on the other, into which Maggie and her belongings were thrust. Then there was a vestibule, one side of which was accommodated with a huge cupboard—pronounced by Mrs Berry to be 'a perfect treasure.'

'One need not mind who calls here,' said Mrs Berry exulting—

'so different from that shabby old *pension*. And did'nt Madame Favert know how to charge! I don't think I'll spend a penny more here, in spite of the awful rent. But we will want a lot of dress; still I am sure there are places where bonnets and things may be got cheaper than in the ruinous Rue St Honoré or Vivienne. We'll go and see about them after lunch. And, Maggie, I shall give you a new dress and bonnet, for you must be with me constant. I never know the moment the Count may drop in. I met him yesterday in the Bois, and he says he is going to bring his sister to call on me; and then Mrs Maclaggan says, I ought to have an evening.'

'What for?' asked Maggie.

'Oh! to receive my friends. And we *must* have a piano. Now, there is a little cold *pâté* in the cupboard, and some cheese, so we'll just make out.' In truth the meals at No. 2, Rue M——, were generally 'made out' in the same way, the shortcoming of which usually fell to Maggie's share.

Nevertheless she was delighted with Paris. The gay and fête-like appearance of all things is so congenial to the buoyancy of youth, that she could not help expecting that something personally delightful must happen in that intoxicating capital.

Then Mrs Berry had become much more generous in the article of dress, and Maggie was no philosopher, to be unmoved by the charms of a fresh becoming bonnet or a well-fitting robe.

So the widow and her fair companion set out in excellent spirits; and not far from their own door encountered a slight dark-eyed *distingué* looking man, dressed in most fashionable attire, but well dressed for a Frenchman, more in the London than the Paris style. Mrs Berry pressed Maggie's arm. 'Here's the Count, I declare!' she whispered.

'Madame Berrie,' said the gentleman, raising his hat with a graceful sweep high over his head, 'I was about to present myself in your saloon, hoping it was not too early to have the honour of being received.'

'Oh no! Count, not at all—come in now,' said Mrs Berry, very graciously; 'we were only going to do a little shopping.'

'And I could not think of interfering with your plans, Madame, cried the Count. 'May I not be permitted to accompany you? nay, might I not be of some service to the fair stranger in selecting the best *magasins?*'

After a little fencing and coquetting on Mrs Berry's part—for

though well pleased to have the Count's escort and agreeable flatteries, she feared it would be incompatible, with her character as a woman of fortune and fashion, to drive hard bargains in his presence—she accepted his offer; and after a slight introduction of Maggie, as 'My young friend, Miss Grey,' the trio proceeded very amicably to the Rue St Honoré.

Monsieur De Bragance spoke English very fairly, though with a strong foreign accent; but when he expressed himself in French, Maggie was struck with the clearness and purity of his accent, and a certain commanding ring in his tones which conveyed an idea of rank and importance. She also observed with some amusement that he entered into the question of hiring a piano with much interest and gravity—recommending a certain *dépôt* where good instruments might be found on moderate terms, and ultimately guiding his companions to a dingy little room in a shabby little street leading from the main artery of St Honoré, where pianos of all kinds were crammed, with wonderful ingenuity as regards stowage. And Maggie's sense of amusement was further gratified by the keenness with which the Count proceeded to bargain and stipulate in his high-bred tones with a snuffy old man in a dusky blouse and a stubbly chin, about the charge per month, the carriage to and fro Mrs Berry's apartment, the tuning, &c., with a keenness and vigour as though the greatest interest was involved in the compact.

Then Mrs Berry declared her only other pressing necessity was a supply of flowers. The all-accomplished Count conducted them to the right place, and bargained earnestly for a regular supply.

Mrs Berry whispered, 'It won't do to go hunting for cheap bonnets now,' in Maggie's ear, and then graciously acceded to the Count's suggestion that they should stroll up the Champs Elysées, and if not too chill, sit for a while and see the great world going for its drive in the Bois de Boulogne. And here too his knowledge seemed illimitable. He knew something of everyone, and not a few occupants, male and female, of the gayest equipages bowed to him with more or less of familiarity. His remarks were shrewd and caustic; and although Maggie felt her vague dislike to him momentarily increase, she also felt that he was a man of education and no mean ability. Mrs Berry was in a condition of pride and exultation not easy to be described. Here she was, well dressed, attended by a man too of such undoubted distinction, absolutely on the point of floating into the highest society—a coronet, as it

wer., within her grasp! No wonder that the ambitious relict of Samuel Berry, erst traveller and commission agent, swelled with gratified vanity, and under such animating influences looked almost handsome.

'How goes it, De Bragance?' said an unmistakably English voice, not full or musical, yet not vulgar. 'I missed you last night at the Baron's, but I suppose you will be with Jones this evening?

'All right, *mon cher*,' returned the Count, smiling pleasantly; and Maggie looking up, remarked the first speaker, a tall, stout, broad-shouldered young man, with light reddish hair, a full, heavy face, and the suspicion of a yellowish moustache.

As she looked up she met his eyes. They were light blue, with a grave wondering expression, but honest eyes, and eagerly fixed upon herself. Catching her glance, he blushed vehemently and looked away. It was strange; though well dressed, and not without a certain air of importance, he reminded her of her kindly, loutish cousin John. These observations, however, had scarce time to flash across her physical and mental vision when the object of them nodded to the Count, and saying, 'This evening, then,' walked quickly away. Mrs Berry was too much engrossed with the fine ladies and equipages before her, to notice the Count's acquaintance; and Maggie would not, even had she cared to know, make any inquiries on the subject.

At length M. De Bragance suggested that it was cold—that Madame might possibly suffer—and in short politely told her to go home. True, he escorted her there, but being specially engaged could not indulge himself by accepting her invitation to enter; and so, with a bow of extreme elegance, he took himself away.

Great was Mrs Berry's sense of enjoyment in so marked a success. 'I declare,' she said, throwing herself into an easy chair, 'I am both tired and hungry. Maggie, don't you think we might get a *petit plat* from that restaurant round the corner? Run down like a good girl and speak to the *concierge*—he is always civil to you—get him to send his little boy. Stay; there's a five-franc piece; bid him be sure and bring the change, and I'll give him two sous for himself.'

The evening that ensued, and many others, were heavy for poor Maggie. For the widow, halting between two opinions, bestowed much of her uncertainty on her companion. Imprimis: Wasn't the Count charming?—quite a man of fashion and devoted to her (Mrs B.). But secondly: Was he rich, as well as elegant and loving?

To which Maggie would reply that she granted the elegance, but doubted both the love and the money. Then the widow would say, 'Law, my dear! you doubt every one's affection because you have no one to make love to yourself. But I *am* afraid of the money. Still, one can't find everything; and I'm sure *my* money would go a long way in France.'

However, though poor and insignificant, Maggie had a good deal of influence on her rich friend. Her clear common sense, her honest regard for Mrs Berry's interest, and above all, her tender nursing when the widow had been so ill, all attached Mrs Berry strongly to her, through the most accessible avenue to the human heart, selfishness. Moreover, a certain quiet force of character told upon the slighter nature in contact with her.

The Count's attentions continued steady, though not assiduous; and February had melted into March without much change in the position of affairs. Maggie's uneasiness on Mrs Berry's account was considerably lulled. She thought M. De Bragance did not intend to propose for her, and she could not reason herself out of the dread and antagonism he had inspired. However, she had watched and assisted her friend through many '*engouements*,' and trusted that, as in other cases, the widow's instinctive love of gold would shield her from the miseries of an imprudent marriage. It was wearisome work to a girl like Maggie—who viewed love as one of the holiest and most sacred of life's mysteries—in short, in the true unpractical light in which youth ought to view it—to listen hour after hour to Mrs Berry's vulgarisms on such a subject, and argue with her round the perpetual circle, whether the Count loved her, or if his rank and standing would suffice with her money, or if it were better to wait for an Englishman of equal distinction. As the days increased in length and warmth, and the crowd in the Bois assumed gayer tints and larger proportions, Maggie rejoiced that her friend went out more and more with the Maclaggans, the Count's sister, Baroness Von Garn, and sundry other acquaintances, chiefly British, of the easiest manners and most restless habits. She was therefore left in peace to her books and work and piano; for with the prospect of Mrs Berry's possible marriage always in the future, Maggie was most eager to fit herself to be a teacher—anything—by which she might escape the horror of returning to her aunt. Thus peacefully employed, she overlooked the chance of other influences gathering round the widow, in spite of her confidence in her *protégée*.

When the piano for which the Count had bargained in so masterly a manner was brought to Mrs Berry's apartment, the *concierge*, a rugged Communistic little man, who in private practised the sartorial art, and was always civil to Maggie, informed her that a musician of unrivalled ability lodged *au cinquième*—'*un homme très comme il faut et d'un talent remarquable*,' but not successful, not known as he ought to be; why, Monsieur *le concierge* could not tell—whereat he shrugged his shoulders. 'Now, if madame or mademoiselle wanted instruction here was an opportunity—supreme genius, vast experience, for a mere bagatelle. Hold! here was one of the worthy gentleman's cards.'

To Maggie's report of this communication did Mrs Berry seriously incline. Monsieur Du Val was sent for, his terms were moderate, he was very accommodating as to hours, and an agreement was entered into upon the spot. He proved not unworthy the eulogiums of his patron the *concierge*, though rather too exacting and conscientious a master to suit Mrs Berry. But Maggie soon formed a friendship for this very simple and, as she found, desolate artist. He was a tall, gaunt, grey man, of sixty or more, with sunken jaws and a thin scattered grizzled beard, great dark eager eyes, which yet could sometimes look mournfully wistful, like those of a stray, weary, helpless child. He was an enthusiast and a dreamer, and yet could sometimes utter marvels of worldly wisdom in the most epigrammatic French. An eager politician, he had, he hinted, suffered for his faith; and Maggie was never tired of listening to his expositions on this subject. He suffered much from rheumatism, and occasionally appeared with a large green shade, for he was subject to inflamed eyes, under which condition, a music lesson was no trifling matter.

Nevertheless, Maggie's heart warmed to him—she was ever ready to do him any little service, and the poor musician in return lavished all his care and skill upon her, and for her sake on that '*drôle de femme*,' whose relationship to Maggie he never could quite understand. So earnest were his instructions that Mrs Berry managed to sing a duet with her 'young friend' without excruciating all ears, and Maggie made tolerable progress in playing.

The widow's Wednesday evening receptions were, she considered, a great success. Thither came the chief of the Maclaggans, with his wife and daughter; thither also came the Count and sundry of his friends—English, French, and Polish, slangy or silent, debonair, and musically replete with *chansons* and *romans*, according to their

nationality, the latter playing frantic mazourkas, and *all* playing cards. The German baroness also came, and sometimes brought other baronesses and Mr De Courcy Jones, reputed a millionnaire, and insanely conceited. Maggie disliked the Count more and more, but his friends were amusing. All were civilly undemonstrative towards herself except the jolly red-faced Highlander, who was kindly and jovial, and bestowed a little extra attention upon her, and one of the Count's friends, a Monsieur Grenier, an artist, a *feuilletoniste*, a general genius, with a haggard face, wild hair, and audacious eyes, who tried to show her more than a little attention, to her great disgust.

Time slipped rapidly and not unpleasantly away, when one evening Mrs Berry returned from a drive in the Bois de Boulogne, with Mrs Maclaggan, in a considerable state of excitement.

'Who do you think the Count is going to bring here to-night, Maggie?'

'I am sure I can't think.'

'Lord Torchester! What do you think of that? An English nobleman of large fortune and high rank, who has asked for an introduction here. Now, there is no knowing but he may take a fancy to me, and though I am sure the Count is just the nicest creature, it would be grand to be an English countess or viscountess, I don't know which.'

'It depends a good deal on what this lord is or has,' said Maggie, laughing; 'but we shall see.'

CHAPTER VII.

Mrs Berry took no small pains to set forth her *petit appartement*, though the time was short. Maggie and the servant whom the widow had added to her establishment, were despatched with *carte blanche* to the nearest florist's, and came back laden with a fragrant burden, which afforded Maggie genuine pleasure to arrange. Then Mrs Berry inquired especially what Maggie intended to wear, and went deeply into the question of her own toilet. Maggie, whose notions of a nobleman were very undefined, laughed hearti-

ly at the idea of all this preparation for a stranger they probably would never see again.

'Lord Torchester ought to be highly flattered,' she said; 'but I assure you I am very reluctant to bring out my new white muslin and blue ribbons for so small an occasion. Its first freshness will be gone, and for what?'

'You're a silly, my dear,' retorted the widow. 'I consider this an occasion when we *all* must put our best foot foremost.'

The Maclaggans and the Baroness had already arrived and partaken of tea, which Mrs Berry insisted on having served English fashion in her *salle à manger*, with Maggie to preside, and Rosalie the *bonne* to hand round a variety of cakes. Mrs Berry had begun to look anxiously at the door, fearing lest any dire mischance should deprive her of her expected guest, when Rosalie threw it open, and M. De Bragance entered, closely followed by a tall high-shouldered, heavy-looking young man, with light hair and eyes and a reddish face. Maggie thought his looks familiar to her, and then remembered that he had spoken to the Count, on the memorable occasion of their having sat together looking at 'the world' in the Champs Elysées.

He was well dressed, and wore blue enamel and diamond shirt studs and waistcoat buttons, and a large signet ring, and was altogether got up in a strain of the highest fashion. Nevertheless, an indescribable air of bulky awkwardness seemed to oppress him, and reminded Maggie irresistibly of kindly, loutish Cousin John, with his patched knees, big hands, and jacket sleeves a world too short for his strong arms.

'Madame,' said M. De Bragance in his elegant way, 'let me present my young friend Lord Torchester, who has been ambitious for some time of an introduction to you.'

'I am sure, I am truly glad to see his lordship,' said Mrs Berry, all in a flutter, 'and so much obliged to him for coming.'

Maggie thought she noticed a bitter contemptuous smile flit over the Count's face as Mrs Berry spoke. The young peer bowed, coloured, stepped back, and trod on the Baroness's foot, then started aside with a flushed, almost agonized look, that moved Maggie both to laughter and pity.

'It is very warm this evening,' observed Lord Torchester, with much originality.

'Yes, it is *very* warm,' replied his fair hostess, as if impressed

with the importance of a newly-discovered truth. 'Will your lordship take a cup of tea?'

'Yes, thank you.' He would have accepted a 'cup of cold pison,' to get away from the Baroness, who yet smiled genially upon him.

'Here, Maggie,' cried Mrs Berry, leading the way to the tea-table, 'give Lord Torchester a cup of tea.'

'Sorry to give you the trouble,' said the young man, in a hoarse and rather unmanageable voice.

'Take a chair, my lord,' said Mrs Berry, who could not pronounce the mellifluous monosyllable often enough, and proceeded to draw one forward—a degree of attention embarrassing to the young peer, who hastened to her assistance so eagerly that he nearly upset the heavy *chaise à Louis Quatorze.*

'Will Madame be so good as to hear a new composition of our friend Kockanowska?' said the Count, as Lord Torchester succeeded in placing himself at the table near Maggie.

'Oh yes, certainly, but Lord Torchester wants some—'

'Mademoiselle can administer that mild refreshment,' said the Count, with a nearly suppressed sneer, of which both Maggie and Lord Torchester were conscious.

'Frenchmen don't care for tea,' he said, as an opening address to the fair tea-maker, as the Count led Mrs Berry to the *salon* and left him in peace.

'I don't think they do; and M. De Bragance does not think anything worth having that he does not like himself,' returned Maggie, feeling unusually at home with the big boyish-looking young nobleman, who, with his shyness and awkwardness, his broad plain honest face and large bony hands, reminded her so much of Cousin John, that she unconsciously spoke to him with a kindly tone and a pleasant friendly smile, so sincere in its expression of goodwill, and so free from the smallest tinge of adulation, that it struck home to the young man's better feelings. He laughed good-humouredly.

'That's just like De Bragance, but,' with a sudden change of tone, 'he's an uncommon clever fellow, I can tell you; there is nothing he can't do. Ride—I never thought a Frenchman could ride like him!—and plays every game that ever was heard of!'

'What a wonderful creature!' said Maggie, with ironical admiration.

'Oh! you are chaffing,' cried Lord Torchester, colouring but

smiling still, so completely had Maggie's manner disarmed his habitual shy distrust. 'But he is a clever, pleasant fellow, only'—

'What?' asked Maggie, as he paused.

'Well, I can't quite make him out; can you?'

'I do not intend to try, but I think I could.'

'Could you?' said the Earl, wondering and slightly incredulous. Maggie gave him a little confident nod and smile—which, though bright and pretty, seemed in some way or other to silence Lord Torchester; for though he looked intently at her for a moment, he did not speak again till she asked if he would have any more tea. Somewhat to her surprise he accepted her offer, and though he looked painfully hot, proceeded to sip the scalding beverage. 'Do you like riding?' he asked abruptly, after a pause.

'I cannot say—I have never tried, but I should like to try very much.'

'Never mounted a horse?' asked the Earl, in great surprise. 'Oh! it's the best fun possible. I have a couple of horses here—one is quite quiet and steady—the very thing for a lady. I wish you would try him one day in the Bois. I could teach you. Do try, Miss—Miss'....

'Grey,' supplied Maggie. 'I wonder what Mrs Berry would say to such a project,' she continued, laughing, startled at the familiarity of the suggestion, yet finding it impossible to resent the boyish frankness with which it was spoken.

'Oh! she would let you. But need you mind her? Is she your aunt? or'..... He was speaking quite eagerly, when the Polish Count appeared with Miss Maclaggan on his arm.

'I am come to beg a cup of tea, Miss Grey,' she said, in her best manner, 'if you and Lord Torchester don't want it all to yourselves.'

'Oh we can spare you a little,' returned Maggie, gaily.

'You should have heard M. Kockanowska's "Last Pensée," my lord,' continued Miss Maclaggan; 'it was really most original, and full of startling harmonies; why did you not come?'

'I don't care much for music,' said Lord Torchester, in a discontented tone. 'What's-his-name, Jones, sings some funny songs; I like them and Scotch songs, but I don't care for the piano.'

'Mrs Berry wants you to play her accompaniment, Miss Grey, resumed Miss Maclaggan.

'Does she? Then I must leave you to pour out your own tea, said Maggie, rising.

The rest of the evening passed much as usual. Lord Torchester played piquet with the Baroness; there was more music—Maggie sang with Mrs Berry, and was a little annoyed by the perseverance with which Lord Torchester pressed her to sing alone. Then there was some talk of a party to see the waters play at Versailles; but at last all were gone, Lord Torchester having staid till the very last.

* * * * *

Mrs Berry, though considerably elated at having a guest of Lord Torchester's rank, did not appear so satisfied as Maggie expected. 'His lordship is very nice, and all that, but he is quite a boy, not to be compared to the Count; and do you know, I met him yesterday in the Tuileries Gardens, and he was near passing me. I wonder if he will come next Wednesday?'

'I don't imagine he will,' said Maggie. 'There can be very little to amuse him here; he can play cards and gamble with M. De Bragance better elsewhere; and I do not think that he cares for music or conversation. Yet, I wish he would come—he is so like poor Cousin John.'

'Like your cousin, the chemist's son!' almost screamed Mrs Berry. 'Well, Maggie! you are the queerest girl!—and so ill-natured about the Count! One would think he was a cheat or some such thing; and all because he likes me better than you. Don't be so horrid jealous. You can't expect to be noticed like me. You haven't my figure, or fortune, or anything!—not but that you're a nice genteel-looking girl, I'm sure.'

'My dear Mrs Berry,' returned Maggie, taking the widow's hand kindly, with a sweet amused smile, 'I do not compare myself with you in any way; but I am too grateful not to be anxious for you; and indeed I do not like the Count De Bragance; he may be very well-bred and handsome, and fond of you at present, but if you marry him I am certain he will spend all your money and make you wretched. Do, dear Mrs Berry, promise to have nothing to do with him till you consult Mr Dunsford, and find out all about him.'

Mrs Berry seemed struck by Maggie's words and earnest manner. She remained silent for a few moments, and then, another train of thought sweeping through her rather rambling brain, she exclaimed coquettishly, 'How do you know the Count wants to marry me? I am not at all sure about it.'

'I am though,' returned Maggie, shaking her head with a pretty

air of solemnity, 'and I am also sure that he has no money of his own and wants yours.'

This was an unfortunate speech, and turned the widow's *amour propre* against her young adviser's counsel.

'Upon my word, Miss Margaret, considering that you have seen nothing—nothing except what I have shown you—you are very ready to set up your judgment and give your opinion! I suppose I am neither so old nor so ugly but that a man might care for me, with or without money.'

'I am sure many might care for you very much,' said Maggie, warmly, 'but M. De Bragance is not one of them; he cares for nothing but himself. Do forgive me if I offend, but feeling as I do about that man it would be wicked of me not to speak out.'

'He is too nice and pleasant to quarrel with,' said Mrs Berry, as if to herself.

'You need not quarrel with him, but don't—pray don't—marry him!' returned Maggie, imploringly.

'Oh! I don't want to marry any one,' cried Mrs Berry pettishly. 'And now I'm going to a sale with Madame von Garn, where I think I shall pick up some lace—real point d'Alençon—a bargain. So I shan't be back till dinner-time, and perhaps not then. You needn't wait—there's some *potage* and cheese, and I know you'll not mind making out. If I come back I'll bring a *pâté* or something with me. So good-bye, Miss Wisdom.'

Maggie sat still where the widow left her, thinking more deeply of realities than she usually did. For her dislike and distrust of M. De Bragance she neither could nor attempted to account, but relied implicitly on the instinct which told he was bad; and although Mrs Berry was no longer the woman of fashion and importance she once appeared to Maggie's unsophisticated eyes, she was sincerely grateful to her. But the widow's faults and follies were now visible enough to her young *protégée*, and so Maggie sat and pondered over all things by the light of what worldly wisdom she had gathered from the various novels in which she had largely indulged.

Yes, she fancied she could read it all. Something indescribable in the style of the card-playing convinced her that the accomplished Count and his associates were *chevaliers d'industrie*, that the widow would be a victim to one or other of them; and then not unnaturally the question arose, What would become of herself?

While endeavouring to solve this difficult problem, Rosalie

entered and said, with some surprise, 'A letter for Mademoiselle.'

A letter was a wonderful event for Maggie, but seeing it was directed in the uncertain spidery writing of her Cousin Bell, she was not eager to open it. As, however, she found nothing very attractive in the contemplation of her own prospects she proceeded to examine its contents.

It contained but a few lines from her cousin, saying that all was well with them, and enclosing another letter directed to 'Miss M. Grey, care of Mr John Grey, chemist,' &c., in a hand she did not quite recognise. It was a foreign letter, directed in a clerkly hand, and after looking at it for a minute or two, as people will do, in the vain hope of divining what they need only open the letter to ascertain, she glanced at the signature, and to her great delight read the name of John Grey.

It was dated nearly four months back, and though brief, considering the distance it had come, gave a tolerably full account of his adventures. He had been successful in his search for gold and precious stones with the wild exploring party he had joined, though the existence of such valuables in the neighbourhood of Cape Colony was not then dreamed of by the mass. On his return he had found himself master of sufficient funds to set up in business on his own account, taking as a junior partner his original friend, who had helped him in his start, but whose firm had failed just after John had left Cape Town. 'If, as I hope I shall, I succeed in scraping some tin together,' he continued, 'I shall want a wife to help me to take care of it, and I might go further and fare worse than with my sweet little cousin. I suppose you are quite a woman by this time, but I forget how old you are—old enough to keep your own with the missus, I hope, for you always had a spirit. Anyhow, keep up your heart, stick to your rights, and do not forget your affectionate cousin, John Grey.'

Maggie smiled as she read, not unpleased, yet slightly disdainful; for the image of John, whom she dearly loved, was impressed upon her memory as the very type of awkward strength, with a wild red head and a squeaky voice. Alas! in the wide world this was the only creature that seemed to love her or think about her; and he was so far away, and perhaps scarce in earnest in what he wrote. Nevertheless, this letter seemed a kind of guarantee that it was possible she might draw forth that affection which is the crown of a woman's life. So Maggie fell into a natural day dream of love

and marriage. She had no ambitions, poor child; only a little bit of fastidiousness, born partly of innate refinement, and partly caught from passing glimpses of picture galleries and cavaliers of gallant bearing at the various German spas through which she had wandered.

Maggie's ideal, however, was very vague, simple, and girlish: a hero artist husband, in a black velvet painting coat, who would adore her, and yet require to be soothed and borne with in his divine impatience of destiny and the general degradation of life, while she—the prudent home-genius—would perform miracles of management, until some potentate would recognise the obscure genius, and fame and fortune come pouring into their lap.

Rousing herself from her reverie with a laugh at her own folly, Maggie turned again to her letter. It was evident Cousin John had never received the one she had written to him from Dover, and now, as she was seldom so free, she would sit down and answer this at once. Knowing that ink was unsafe in the sacred saloon, Maggie spread her modest appliances for writing in the *salle à manger*, and was scribbling away with a rapid pen and a full heart, when Rosalie again entered, this time with a card.

'*Un jeune Monsieur désire parler avec Mademoiselle.*'

Maggie looked at the card. 'The Earl of Torchester! How provoking! I suppose he has some message for Mrs Berry,' and without a glance at the mirror Maggie went quickly into the saloon, where she found the young man standing very uncomfortably in the middle of the room. 'Mrs Berry is out,' said Maggie, after the first salutations, 'and will not return till late.'

'I do not want Mrs Berry,' said the Earl abruptly, looking with shy pleasure at Maggie, who, though in the simplest of blue muslin morning dresses, showing her white neck and arms through its clear folds, was a very pleasant object—her soft brown hair a little roughened by resting her head on her hand during her frequent lapses into dreamland while she wrote, and the look of happiness called up by her cousin's letter still lighting her eyes and dimpling round her lips.

'I don't want her,' repeated the Earl.

'Then what *do* you want?' said Maggie, smiling, too content to be ceremonious.

'Oh, nothing, only when will you come and ride as we were arranging?'

'As we were arranging?' repeated Maggie, laughing outright.

'I do not think we arranged anything, and I do not think anything of the kind can be arranged.'

'Why not?' asked Lord Torchester, placing himself near her. 'There is no reason why you should not ride with me. Why should Mrs What-do-you-call-her refuse or object?'

'Perhaps she would not. Still, you know, I could not—I don't know how to ride.'

'I could teach you; and it would be *such* fun!'

'But I have no habit, or hat, or whip.'

'You could get them easily in a day. My tailor makes habits.'

'And then, are we to ride all alone together? That would not be *comme il faut*, my lord.'

'I know that; but De Bragance, or Jones, or Miss Mac something, would come,' insisted the Earl eagerly; 'or your aunt herself—she's quite young enough and light enough to ride.'

'Well, you may ask her; but I imagine it won't do. And she is *not* my aunt.'

'Well, what relation is she? Why are you with her? You are not a bit like her.'

'I live with her as her companion, and keep her accounts, and help her in any way I can; but we are no relations. I do not think she considers me grand enough for a relation.'

'Doesn't she?' cried the Earl, with unfeigned astonishment. 'Why? But,' interrupting himself, as if suddenly perceiving that his curiosity was indiscreet, 'would you not like to ride with me yourself?'

'Yes, indeed I should; but not here—away in the country—away from all these people.'

'Ah, yes! I wish we *were* away from them all,' said Lord Torchester earnestly, with a sigh and a quick but tender glance; and then he stopped abruptly and coloured to the roots of his hair.

'Perhaps you might find a desolate island somewhere to let, if you inquired,' replied Maggie, with a sweet frank laugh that quite neutralised any sting of sarcasm there might have lurked in her speech.

'I say, don't you chaff a fellow so awfully,' said the Earl good-humouredly. 'Why, you are as bad to chaff as my cousin Margaret.'

'Have you a cousin Margaret? That is my name.'

'Is it? Ah, I like Margaret.'

'Which?' asked Maggie fearlessly—looking on the Earl as a mere boy, immeasurably her junior (though, despite his immature appearance, he was really a year older), and amused by his ill-concealed admiration—while she fretted notwithstanding at the interruption to her delightful occupation of writing to Cousin John. So, while Lord Torchester struggled to find some suitable and expressive phrase in which to reply, Maggie continued: 'I am sure you will excuse me if I tell you that I want very much to finish a letter to a very dear friend, now that Mrs Berry is out; and I so seldom have any time to myself. Pray don't think me rude or unkind.'

'No, no. But, Miss Grey, can't I stay till you've finished? I'll not disturb you,' said Lord Torchester imploringly; for being in truth a very spoilt child of fortune, he had no idea of giving up a pleasure to suit another's convenience; and Maggie's simple girlish manner put him delightfully at his ease.

'Oh, yes, if you care to stay; but it will be so stupid for you. There is no paper. Can you read French?'

'Pretty well.'

'There are plenty of books, then,' said Maggie, pointing to the table, 'but I shall be some time.'

'I don't mind. Look here, Miss Grey—are you writing in the other room? Can't I take my book there?'

'It is pleasanter here,' said Maggie, beginning to feel a little worried by his perseverance.

'No, it isn't—do let me come.'

'I am not sure it is quite right; but come.' So saying, she led the way to the *salle à manger*. The Earl, snatching up a yellow volume at random from the table, followed close on her heels, and when she sat down to her letter placed himself exactly opposite.

But the pleasure of the occupation was over. Fancy and thought would not flow while Maggie felt the young man's eyes were fixed upon her. So after scribbling on for a short time she found herself writing so incoherently that she put down her pen as if she had finished, and looked up slightly flushed with the consciousness of having been watched.

'By Jove! how fast you write!' exclaimed Lord Torchester, who had greatly enjoyed lounging at his ease with the unrestricted privilege of staring to his heart's content. 'Now, there is nothing I hate like writing. I am an hour over two or three lines.'

'Are you?' said Maggie, with a sunny smile, at this candid confession. 'You had better employ me for a secretary. Mrs Berry will give me an excellent character.'

'I wish you *were* my secretary!' exclaimed Lord Torchester eagerly, and then coloured crimson.

'Remember, I expect enormous pay,' continued Maggie, as she put away her writing things; 'half a guinea an hour, at least.'

'How you chaff!' said the young peer admiringly.

'How shall I get rid of him?' thought Maggie.

'Suppose you write a letter for me, now,' said Lord Torchester, as if he had divined her thought and was determined to defeat it. 'I ought to write to my mother; and somehow or other I find it so hard to manage.'

'What!' cried Maggie, in undisguised astonishment, 'hard to write to your own mother? Is she not kind and fond of you?'

'Yes; I suppose no one in the world cares so much for me; but somehow or other I never know what to say to her, she is so good.'

'Can you not describe your friends?—M. De Bragance, for instance,' returned Maggie, with playful malice—then changing her tone and train of thought—'If I had a mother, how delighted I should be to write to her everything, anything!'

'But you haven't, I suppose?' said Lord Torchester, not unsympathetically.

'No,' said Maggie, her kindly honest eyes filling with unshed tears. 'I have lost my beautiful darling mother, and no one else will ever love me like her.'

'I don't know. A husband might,' suggested the Earl.

'Possibly, but by no means probably,' cried Maggie. 'And now, suppose I were to say I really must leave you? Would you think me very rude, and be vexed?'

'Of course I shan't; but why must you go? It is so quiet and pleasant here. *Must* you go?'

'Yes; I have something to do for Mrs Berry.'

'Can't I go with you?' persisted the young man, thinking the something was an out-door errand.

'Hardly,' said Maggie, laughing; 'the important business which calls me away is to put some white lace on a black velvet bodice for Mrs Berry before six o'clock.'

'No! have you though?' cried the Earl, opening his eyes still wider; 'I thought women in shops did all that sort of thing.'

'And a good many women out of them too,' said Maggie, feeling very anxious to get rid of him—'so I must bid you good-bye, you see Have you no message for Mrs Berry?' she added with instinctive precaution.

'No—yes, tell her I want you both to ride with me, and not to forget the Versailles party.

'Very well,' returned Maggie.

Lord Torchester shook hands with her loosely, and departed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE day of the Versailles fête was splendidly fine, and Mrs Berry in radiant spirits. She had been to a *soirée* the evening before with Mrs Maclaggan, where she had been much flattered by the attentions of M. De Bragance, displayed too before her former friends and rivals—Lady and Miss Salter, who had unexpectedly re-appeared. They usually made periodical visits to Paris, and finding Mrs Berry accepted in what they considered brilliant society, they were quite *empressé* in their expressions of pleasure at the meeting, and made themselves so agreeable, that Mrs Berry patronisingly asked Miss Salter to accompany her on the following day to the fête, particularly as the Earl of Torchester, 'Such a nice young fellow,' as Mrs Berry observed with a thrilling assumption of familiarity, was to be of the party. The invitation was eagerly accepted, and occasioned Mrs Berry to announce a change in her intentions, and the motives thereof, with her usual candour to Maggie.

'Now, what do you think of that?' she concluded, after a vivid description of what 'she said,' and 'he said,' and how Miss Salter looked, and how devoted the Count was.

'I suppose you were very much amused,' replied Maggie. 'Lord Torchester was not there.'

'No! he doesn't care for society; you know, between ourselves, he isn't to be compared to the Count; he is not half so like a real nobleman.'

'He is quite different, at all events; but he was here this evening and left this bouquet,' presenting a splendid one.

'What, for me?—gracious goodness!' cried the widow.

'Well, I suppose so; but really he was so confused and stupid about it I hardly know.'

'At any rate it was not for *you*, and it must be for me,' exclaimed Mrs Berry, never for a moment counting Maggie in the category of girls who could have bouquets presented to them.

'Very likely,' said Maggie smiling. 'I'll ask him to-morrow.'

'I declare to goodness, Maggie,' cried Mrs Berry, reprovingly, 'you no more mind what you say to his lordship than if he was quite a common person.'

'Well, and so he is, very common,' returned Maggie, on purpose to horrify her patroness.

'If ever a girl was spoilt you are, Maggie, and you haven't a grain of sense in some ways. However that's neither here nor there. About to-morrow—the Salters were so civil and all that, I thought I ought to ask Selina to come with me to-morrow; but of course I can't pay for two besides myself, so you'll not mind staying at home, Maggie. You see, Selina is *Lady* Salter's daughter; and very fashionable-looking, and all that (you can't think how well dressed she was to-night); and it will perhaps be better *she* should come with me.'

'No doubt,' exclaimed Maggie, without a shade of bitterness; 'but I *am* so sorry to miss seeing the grand fête,' and tears of disappointment rose to her eyes.

'Well, I am sorry too, but it can't be helped. I'll take you somewhere else instead—see if I don't. And now we must go to bed.'

To bed accordingly they retired, and though it may detract somewhat from Maggie's heroine-like dignity, it must be admitted that she cried a little before dropping to sleep, both at the disappointment and the sense of her own insignificance. But then she now knew and estimated Mrs Berry so thoroughly that the mortification was but slight. 'She likes me twice as well as Miss Salter,' she reflected; 'she likes me as well as she can like any one, and by-and-by, if I deserve it, I shall find some one to love me as well as I could love, and that will be a great deal.'

The morning was bright and fresh, and Mrs Berry, clad in mauve silk and white lace, with malachite ornaments—picked up, let us whisper, in the Palais Royal, and 'dirt cheap'—looked (she thought) nearly as bright, with the help of a *soupçon*.

Maggie saw her start with some regret, for which the widow

little cared, as she drove off to the rendezvous, which was the railway terminus in the Rue St Lazare, calling *en route* for the elegant Selina.

Mr, Mrs, and Miss Maclaggan were there before her, and Mr de Courcy Jones; and the necessary introductions had scarcely been made when Madame von Garn and Monsieur Grenier, her attendant in ordinary, drove up *en fiacre*, as Mrs Berry observed exultingly, while she had arrived *en remise*. The station was crowded to excess, all the world being *en route* for the fête, and sufficient delay ensued before M. De Bragance and Lord Torchester made their appearance to make the widow's heart beat a little, lest the bright particular stars of the party should be lost in the crowd.

'What has become of the Count and Lord Torchester?' asked 'The Maclaggan,' who was got up in a wonderfully fresh and sporting style, and, but for his red nose, would have been a handsome man, quite debonair, in a green cut-away coat, drab trousers, a white waistcoat, and a rose in his button-hole.

'Can't think,' replied De Courcy Jones. 'I hope Torchester will turn up, for he was to give us a grand spread, and though I believe it is all ordered, we could hardly walk in and devour it without the host.'

'My brother will not fail us, at all events,' said the Baroness emphatically. 'The attraction for him is too strong.'

Mrs Berry looked conscious and simpered. Glancing round the party her heart swelled with pride and pleasure to observe, first, its distinguished and fête-like aspect, the gay costumes of lace and muslins, and bright silks, gorgeous parasols, and delicate pale gloves; secondly, that her own toilet was quite unapproached. Still, there were a few agonizing moments, and then the tall figure of Lord Torchester was seen slowly forcing his way through the crowd, followed by De Bragance and the musical Pole.

'*Mille pardons*,' whispered De Bragance; 'it was all the fault of that lazy *milord*. He was one hour and a quarter over his toilet.'

Mrs Berry smiled most graciously. 'I am sure I do not know whatever we should have done without you.'

'Now then,' cried Mr Maclaggan, 'there is no time to lose—we have missed one train already—who'll take the tickets?'

'Oh! I have brought my fellow, Antoine,' said Lord Torchester, in his slow tones; 'he'll do all that, and save a monstrous lot of trouble. How do ye do, Miss Maclaggan? How do ye do, Mrs Berry? Eh! where is Miss Grey?—what's become of Miss Grey?'

'Oh! she has a slight cold, and staid at home. My young friend Miss Salter here,' with a wave of her hand, 'was kind enough to come in her place.'

The young Earl was too much stupefied by this sudden disappointment even to raise his hat. He stood a moment with a fixed stare and drooping face, while Mrs Berry went on, 'I am sure, my lord, I don't know how to thank you for these beautiful flowers.'

'Oh! ah!—the flowers,' said Lord Torchester, glancing at them; and then, lighting up with a look of sullen indignation, turning to his valet, a supple, keen-looking Italian, a professed travelling servant, he drew him aside, and gave him a few energetic directions. 'De Bragance,' he called aloud as the man left him, 'here! Sorry I can't go down with you—I—I must write some letters; but I will probably join you later. You must take all these people to dine at the Hotel du Reservoir. Antoine has orders about everything, and you must act for me.'

"*Parbleu!*' cried the Count, who by no means admired this originality on the part of the young man he wished to keep in leading-strings. 'This will hardly do. What is your motive? Where'—

'What's that do you, *mon cher?*' interrupted Lord Torchester sulkily, and in a tone that showed that he would not bear interference.

'I say, Mrs Berry, Madame, Mrs Maclaggan, I'm very sorry that I am obliged to go back. Business of some importance—can't be helped—hope to meet you at dinner,' and not waiting for a reply he walked quickly away.

'Gracious goodness!' cried Mrs Berry, 'what has happened, Count? I have not offended his lordship, have I? Won't he come?'

'Madame, I cannot account for the *bizarreries* of your compatriot; let me hope that Lord Torchester's absence will not destroy your enjoyment.'

'Law, Count, I am afraid you are horribly jealous! I'm sure I don't mind, only it's a disappointment to the other ladies.' This was proudly disclaimed, though probably true.

'Here is Antoine with the tickets,' said M. de Bragance impatiently, 'and we must hope to see our illustrious friend at dinner. *Allons, mes amis, allons!*'

When Mrs Berry drove away, Maggie felt not a little desolate. She sat down to the piano, and played dreamily waltzes and airs which she knew by ear, thinking all the while in an indefinite

manner, what should she do all the long day that was before her, and what should she do also all the long life that was before her? Mrs Berry would certainly marry some one, if not the Count, and then her present occupation would be over. However, she now knew a good deal of French and German, and a little of music; so she might offer herself as a governess. It would be much better to have a definite position, however humble—but she did not know enough, not half enough. She would go that moment and write a French exercise, and try to do the same every day. She rose quickly, full of the idea, and turning, almost knocked against Lord Torchester.

'Why! what is the matter? anything wrong?' she exclaimed, her first idea being that some terrible accident had taken place and Mrs Berry had sent for her.

'No, nothing—all's right,' said Lord Torchester. 'But how's your cold? and why did you give away my flowers? Are you really too unwell to go to the fête?'

'I never was better,' cried Maggie.

'I thought so!' said the Earl. 'I have come back for you. I have a carriage at the door. We'll catch the ten o'clock train and be in time for everything. So make haste, put on your bonnet and things.'

'And you have come back for me?' said Maggie, colouring with pleasure. 'How kind of you! I will get ready as quick as I can, but I must change my dress, so you will not mind waiting ten minutes?'

'I'll wait as long as ever you like,' cried Lord Torchester, overjoyed at her ready assent, as he anticipated some difficulties on the score of propriety. But no such objections entered Maggie's head, the Earl's simple statement that he had 'come back for her,' conveying to her mind the impression that (probably owing to some good-natured suggestion of his own) Mrs Berry had sent him for her—Maggie's general ideas of abstract propriety being very indefinite.

'Thank you; you are really very good;' and she flew out of the room. Hastily gathering her things together, she absolutely carried them into the sacred apartment of Mrs Berry, where there was more room and a larger glass, securing *en passant* the good offices of Rosalie, with whom she was a prime favourite.

'*Mon dieu*, Mademoiselle! how content I am that you go to the fête. But take care—you go alone with this young gentleman?'

'Only to join Mrs Berry,' cried Maggie in all sincerity; 'and as to the young gentleman, he is a mere boy.'

'*Ces garçons-là sont bien dangereux*,' replied Rosalie with a solemn shake of the head.

'*Soyez tranquille*,' said Maggie, with a gay sweet laugh. '*Point de danger, ma bonne amie.*'

'There now! Lord Torchester—I have not been long?'

'Long? no! by Jove! Why you are quicker than my mother, and I thought no woman dressed as quick as she does. How nice you look!' with hearty admiration.

'Do I? I am very glad; you will not be ashamed of me—one moment and I shall be quite ready.' So saying, Maggie quickly locked one or two drawers and placed the keys in a cabinet, and hung the key of that by a ribbon round her neck.

'Come along then,' said the Earl, leading the way down.

'I am afraid I must ask you to stop at a glove shop; I cannot do without a new pair.'

'By all means. Stop at—Rue de la Paix.'

'Oh, that is a ruination shop! Shall we not pass near some of the passages?'

'Those passage places are mere rubbish. No, no; come to my man. I'll choose them,' cried the young peer, excited into unusual animation by the extraordinary success of his own unwonted decision and originality, the pleasure he had evidently given, and the brightness of his companion. For his lordship was quite right; Maggie did look very nice. She had put on the famous and carefully-preserved white muslin with the blue ribbons, and a fascinating little white lace bonnet of her own contrivance, with bouquets of forget-me-nots, resting on her soft brown hair; the light of sudden unlooked-for joy flushing her smooth young cheek and deepening the colour of her frank grey eyes.

There was not a happier pair in Paris at that moment, for their happiness was so childlike in its innocent freedom from all deeper thought or passion.

'Here's the place,' cried Lord Torchester, opening the door. 'What's your number?'

'Six and a half.'

'All right,' and he dashed into the shop.

'I trust and hope he will not bring me a pink pair,' thought Maggie. 'And what an awful price he will pay!'

'Now then,' said he, returning after a few minutes' absence, 'I

wasn't sure about the colour, so you can choose from these, opening a packet of a dozen pairs, and placing them on her lap. To the coachman: 'To the *embarcadère*, quick.'

'Oh! Lord Torchester, but the gloves! Here is a beautiful straw-coloured pair, won't you return the others?'

'No, of course not—they are all your size.'

'But, indeed, indeed, I would rather not,' urged poor Maggie.

'Nonsense; they are not worth talking about. I'll put them in my pocket for you till we come back.'

Every step of the delightful route was full of enchantment to the young Earl—now tasting, for the first time in a life which had hitherto been strangely denuded of excitement, the divine intoxication of Love. To give his arm to Maggie and lead her to the waiting-room gave him so grand a sense of manliness and responsibility. Then he went alone to take their tickets, and enjoyed that too. For though painfully shy in society, he was physically brave enough; and the habit of command which a youth and boyhood of observance from his inferiors had induced, made him fancy he had but to speak to insure obedience. So he got the tickets and counted the change carefully; for wealthy and high-born though he was, the young man had instinctive sense of the value of money, which was one of his many contradictory characteristics.

But neither his money nor his lordly tone could procure him a special carriage; so he was obliged, with his fair companion, to make two of a party of six.

One of these, a small fair man—evidently an Englishman of condition—after looking steadily at Lord Torchester and Maggie with a half-amused smile, leant forward and said in a soft drawling tone. 'How do, Torchester?'

'Oh!' returned the Earl, 'I did not expect to see you here—thought you were in Norway.' They shook hands.

'I came back about a week ago with Geoff. Trafford, and left him in London. Going to the fête like myself, all alone, I suppose?' he added, with a sly glance at Maggie.

'No,' replied Lord Torchester stoutly. 'We are to join our party at Versailles and dine at the Hotel du Reservoir about six. If you are not engaged you had better join us. My friends will be very happy to see you—eh, Miss Grey?' (to Maggie).

Maggie smiled and bowed; and the two gentlemen continued at intervals to talk of people and things and horses—all far away beyond Maggie's ken—till the journey was over.

Arrived at Versailles, they found the faithful Antoine in waiting with a smart open carriage.

As they were about to enter it the Earl suddenly said: 'I ought to have introduced you. Lord Alfred St Lawrence, Miss Grey. Shall we take you up to the palace?'

'No, thank you,' replied Lord Alfred, with a profound bow to Maggie and a whispered '*Pas si bête*,' to his friend.

'At six then, remember,' said the Earl.

Lord Alfred raised his hat, and watched them out of sight.

The sudden defection of Lord Torchester threw a decided damp over Mrs Berry's party, in spite of the strong efforts made by the ladies to disguise the effect. Miss Salter felt that she had been cheated and imposed upon; Miss Maclaggan that a chance, however faint, had been lost; and Madame von Garn that a legitimate prey had escaped. Perhaps Mrs Berry was the least affected. But a visible and resentful cloud hung on the Count's brow.

Nevertheless, the bright day, the gay concourse, the beautiful stately gardens, produced their effects; and by the time the party had placed themselves to view the playing of the waters a happier frame of mind had been restored. Mrs Berry, with that eagerness to see all she could for her money which distinguished her, had mounted on a chair, and steadied herself by laying her hand on the Count's shoulder. She thus enjoyed a commanding view around, and had not stood there long when she attracted universal attention by a loud exclamation, almost a scream, of astonishment: 'Why, my goodness, Count! if here ain't his lordship and Maggie, I declare!' Whereupon all eyes were turned upon them.

'However did you come?' cried Mrs Berry, with some indignation.

'I found Miss Grey was all right,' put in Lord Torchester with surprising readiness, 'so I persuaded her to come.'

'Did you not send for me?' said Maggie, infinitely distressed. 'I quite understood that you did; though,' pausing for a moment, I cannot say that Lord Torchester said so; but I quite believed you did.'

'That which we wish it is easy to believe,' said the Count sneeringly—on which the ladies also smiled superior.

'Exactly so, cried Maggie, nettled into a candour which was her best defence. 'I wished very much to come; and Lord Torchester—unintentionally, no doubt—gave me the impression that Mrs Berry had sent for me. However,' she continued, addressing her

patroness, her eyes filling with tears of mortification and wounded feeling. 'I can very easily return; there is no crowd going up, and I can go back alone.' She half turned away; but Mrs Berry, whose *amour propre* was quite satisfied by the Count's attentions, caught a sudden mental glimpse of the true state of affairs, which struck her as tending to her own glorification; so she beamed her kindliest smile upon Maggie, and exclaimed, 'My dear child, don't be a silly! You know I am truly pleased to see you—only you must take care of your chest. Have you brought nothing warm to tie round your throat? I am sure I am quite obliged to you, my lord—for the day has turned out so fine there *can* be no risk.'

Maggie turned her head to hide the look of contempt which she could not keep from her mouth and eyes, and as she turned, met those of Lord Torchester fixed upon her. 'If you wish to go back, I'll take you,' said he, confidentially but audibly. Whereat looks of intelligence passed from one to the other of the observers, and Maggie immediately rose immeasurably in importance, but lost the small degree of popularity she had possessed.

She was miserably uncomfortable for a short time; but then the Earl was so kind, Mrs Berry so cordial, Madame von Garn so friendly and polite, that by the time the waters began to play, the happy joyousness with which she had set out was restored; and her gaiety, her quick perception of what was droll or beautiful, gave Lord Torchester's slower nature a taste of such keen enjoyment as he had rarely experienced.

Then when the display was over they all separated, to meet at the hotel for dinner. The Earl's pleasure was a little damped by Maggie's good-natured attention to Miss Salter, from whom Mrs Berry soon disengaged herself, and who was a stranger to all the rest. Maggie felt she could not desert her, so the refined Selina had the infinite gratification of the Earl's attendance. Certainly Maggie gave them a good deal of exercise. She was eager to see every specially historical locality, and quite overwhelmed Lord Torchester with her knowledge of the place.

'How can you think of it all?' he exclaimed. 'I can't remember half these things.'

'I always liked history; and then, you know, I thought I was to come here to-day, so I got a book about it and read up.'

'What a goose she is!' thought Miss Salter.

'I am afraid I am tiring you,' said Maggie to her companions, 'but I shall never have such a chance again, so I want to see all I can.'

'Well, as I have seen it before,' said Miss Salter, 'I will just sit down by this window while you go through the galleries, if you will come back for me.'

'All right,' said the Earl. 'Come, Miss Grey, if the pictures don't tire you I shall say you have enormous powers of endurance. I say,' as they got further from Miss Salter, 'can't you sit down and rest? Here is a nice quiet place on the terrace—now we have got rid of that awful old woman.'

'But then I shall not see half what is to be seen,' said Maggie, rather ungraciously.

'Never mind, you can come again when there is not such a crowd. I'll come with you whenever you like.'

'My dear Lord Torchester,' a little impatiently, 'you know that is quite impossible. You see how every one looked when we joined Mrs Berry to-day. I was so annoyed, for there can be *no* real harm in my going anywhere with you.'

'Not a bit, by Jove!' cried the young peer, with much energy; 'so it's no matter.'

'Yes, to me it is very great matter! but we need not talk about it. I have to thank you for the pleasantest day I ever had.'

'Is it though?' said Lord Torchester, colouring. 'I am sure it is the pleasantest day I ever spent. Do stay here,' entreatingly, as she made a movement to rise. 'I hate standing about staring at these miles of pictures.'

'Oh! you *are* so like my cousin John!' cried Maggie, laughing. 'He was a great tall creature, and *so* lazy sometimes.'

'Who the deuce is he? I never heard of him before.'

'He is my uncle's eldest son, and he was always very good to me—better than any one else.'

'Hum!' returned Lord Torchester, rather sullenly; 'and I suppose you were very fond of him?'

'I *am* very fond of him,' said Maggie emphatically, with some sense of mischief.

'Where is he—in London?'

'No, he has been with an exploring party in South Africa.'

'Awful set of scamps—these travelling exploring fellows,' said the Earl, with a considerable sense of relief. 'You should hear *my* cousin Geoff. Trafford's stories of them. I say,' looking at his watch, 'it is six o'clock—we must go find that friend of yours—

Miss Pickle, or what do you call her? But I promise you, you shall see all the pictures and everything another day.'

* * * * *

Lord Torchester's little dinner was most successful. Lord Alfred St Lawrence was a welcome addition to the party. He was a swell of a good type, and very ready to make himself agreeable in his own slow sleepy way. Somehow or other he produced even a greater effect than the Earl, with his higher rank and reputation of wealth. He told lots of news, paid a subdued sort of homage to the Baroness, and broke a lance or two in repartee with the Count.

Maggie did not care much for the dinner; she was very tired, and a little worried by the attentions of Lord Torchester, which were more calculated to gratify himself than their object.

At last it was all over, and the party returned to Paris, separating at the railway station, except the Count and the Earl, who escorted Mrs Berry and her young friend to their abode.

'It is too late to ask you in,' said Mrs Berry, feeling uncertain as to the condition of her larder. 'I am sure we have had a delightful day.'

'We could not think of intruding on you,' replied Monsieur De Bragance; 'and *milord* has promised to take coffee and a pipe at my apartment; but allow me'——He drew Mrs Berry apart, and spoke to her for a few moments.

'Listen to me, Lord Torchester,' whispered Maggie in her turn; 'don't go with M. De Bragance to-night—don't—promise me! I'll tell you why another time—do mind what I say.'

'Well, I'll try and get off; but what can you fear?'

'I consider you have promised,' said Maggie holding out her hand. 'Good night.'

And the Earl did get off the *petit parti carré* which the Count proposed; but instead of going to bed unlocked his writing-case, and with much labour, and the destruction of divers sheets of 'extra thick cream laid coronetted note,' indited a voluminous epistle, which towards midnight he folded, sealed, and directed, with a sigh of relief, to

'The COUNTESS of TORCHESTER,
'The Beeches,
'Richmond.'

In another apartment of the Hotel Meurice, Lord Alfred St Law-

rence smoked a choice cheroot and scribbled a couple of pleasant gossiping letters to his kinsfolk and acquaintance. Towards the end of the second he wrote: 'I have just returned from Versailles, where we had a grand display of waterworks and an awful crowd. However, I must admit that French cockneys are less objectionable and unsightly than English ones. By the way, I dined there with Torchester, and am much edified by the results of the Countess's specially careful training. What would Exeter Hall have said to find him escorting a very pretty piquante nameless girl to the fête, all alone by themselves, and afterwards entertaining a very cloudy society at a capital dinner at the Hôtel du Reservoir. The women were "very awful," with the exception of the above-mentioned young lady; and the men "legs." I can't help fancying I have heard or known something of one of them, who, by the way, seemed a gentleman. You have been longer on the town than myself, have you ever heard the name of "De Bragance"? I think some one ought to look after Torchester. I imagine he is in a bad set.'

This was directed to

'GEOFFREY TRAFFORD, Esq.,
'Travellers' Club,
'London.'

CHAPTER IX.

JOHN GEORGE BOSCAWEN TRAFFORD, Earl of Torchester, 'was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.' In these words may be traced the source of an education somewhat exceptional.

Lady Torchester belonged to the later times of the Evangelical movement, and was deeply imbued with the spirit of her party. In her mind was mingled that extraordinary 'conglomerate' of maxims and opinions which was not uncommon in the generation now passing away, wherein the personal humility which would accept rebuke from any Chadband whose zeal disposed him to bestow it, was chequered by the pride of caste, which blended harmoniously enough with the exclusive doctrine of election.

The late Earl—an honest-hearted gentleman, with the appearance

of a farmer and the tastes and habits of a sportsman—cared for none of these things. Religion, almsgiving, Dorcas clubs, and worsted-work were, he thought, the legitimate occupations and amusements of women, as sport and farming of men. He was a kind and considerate husband, and, had such a thing been feasible, would willingly have had a preserve of parsons for his wife's gratification, that she might enjoy a variety of sport; or—not to speak profanely—a diversity of expoundings, exhortations, and extemporary prayer. However, it was well understood that his own ways were by no means to be interfered with. Any number of privileged ministers might offer up any amount of prayers for his spiritual welfare, but *this* was their limit.

Having an unbounded respect for his wife's character—and justly, for the Countess was emphatically a good woman—he left her sole guardian to their only child, a big bony boy of six,—recommending her, however, to take counsel in all matters of difficulty with his dear and valued brother, Geoffrey Trafford.

The Honourable Geoffrey—different in all respects, save honesty, from the deceased Earl—did his best to keep the fanatical element from mingling too largely in the young peer's education, and many were the ungodly amusements which he owed to his uncle's intervention; but unfortunately the Honourable Geoffrey died before the Earl had attained his twelfth year, leaving a son about twenty-four, the only survivor of several children. Thus the noble widow was left helpless in the hands of the strictest Pharisees which the Evangelical school of that day could bring forth.

Lord Torchester's boyhood was consequently at once gloomy and indulged, Lady Torchester always endeavouring to atone by concessions in what was not forbidden, for restrictions as to unholy indulgences. The contamination of school was, of course, to be avoided, and a resident tutor of Low Church doctrine and aristocratic principles was installed as supreme director of the young man and his mother. Indeed, the Countess hesitated long about college, dreading the evil tendencies of Oxford, just then showing the cloven foot of Tractarianism; and nothing but the energetic remonstrances of young Geoffrey Trafford, who had gradually succeeded to his father's post of prime counsellor to the mother, and prime favourite with the son, saved the Earl from a completely home education. Cambridge was selected for him as the least dangerous of the two universities, but even here he was watched and guarded to an incredible extent.

That the young man was not driven into the wildest excesses by such a system was owing probably more to a certain heaviness of nature and proud shyness than to any inherent nobility or acquired principle. There was little real harm in the lad. He was selfish, both from nature and training, just rather than generous, and inclined to seek relief from his own dullness in some strong excitement, which, coupled with a lurking strain of avarice, disposed him to gambling; but he was affectionate and truthful, though hitherto oppressed with a silent, sullen resentment against his mother (whom yet he loved) and the 'forty-parson power' brought to bear against his natural longing for godless sports, companions, and freedom; so he characteristically held his tongue and bided his time till his twenty-first birthday should bring him emancipation.

The day but one following the Versailles fête was somewhat cold and showery in London and its vicinity. The Countess of Torchester had a wood fire burning in the luxurious boudoir at her dower-house, 'The Beeches,' a charming villa, the grounds of which joined Richmond Park, so that from the windows of the principal sitting-rooms a wide domain appeared to spread around. The Countess sat in an easy-chair near one of the windows. She was a tall, large, fair woman, handsomer in middle age than in youth, and aristocratic in style, without special refinement of face or figure. Her costume of rich black silk, her cap of point lace, her surroundings of rare china, deep-toned buhl and inlaid ebony cabinets, the hangings of delicate chintz and lace, all bore the stamp of a solid and mellow taste harmonising well with her age and character.

A book of sombre aspect, entitled 'Saved so as by Fire,' lay open on her lap, her large white jewelled hands resting crossed upon it as she leaned back in her chair with something of weariness and despondency in her attitude and expression; for Henrietta, Countess of Torchester, *was* depressed by an attack of severe cold. She was dissatisfied as to her son's occupations and associates, and her study of 'Saved so as by Fire' was, to say the least of it, not enlivening.

Her solitude was broken by the entrance of a grave, almost lady-like woman, a few years younger than herself, with a cap on her head and a small tray, bearing a broth-basin, in her hand.

'Some beef-tea, my lady; you have scarce tasted anything to day.'

'Thank you, Gifford,' said Lady Torchester politely; 'I must try

and eat it. I think if Hammond would bring me a glass of burgundy, I should like it.'

'Certainly, my lady,' said Gifford, drawing a small table near and placing the tray and basin upon it.

She left the room, but soon returned, followed by a stately and reverend-looking butler bearing the desired beverage.

'What did Mr Trafford say when he called yesterday?' asked Lady Torchester, slowly sipping the rare burgundy.

'Mr Trafford made many inquiries about your ladyship, and then asked to see Mrs Gifford.'

'Did he say how long he would be in town?'

'No, my lady; Mr Trafford was extremely sorry to find you had been unwell, and hoped you would let him know when you could receive him, as he would not leave town without seeing you. He also asked for my lord's address.'

'And you told him Meurice's, Paris?' asked the Countess, languidly.

'Yes, my lady.'

'Well, leave me, Gifford; I shall try and sleep. When I awake bring me the small writing-table—put on some more wood, I am cold.'

Gifford made up the fire softly, drew down the blinds, placed a footstool under her lady's feet, and departed.

Silence reigned over the mansion, for the Countess had no guests—rather an unusual case—as she generally had some evangelically inclined young lady in training, and a colonial bishop or two, or a batch of missionaries; besides, she was very hospitable to her own and the late Earl's numerous relations—albeit, in general an unsympathetic and ungodly set—so Hammond's vocation was suspended for the time, there being no late dinner. He was therefore at liberty to read the paper to the dignified cook and housekeeper, while William, the footman, stole away to the stable and discussed the odds on the coming Doncaster with the coachman. The only interruption was the arrival of the afternoon post, and that disturbed Mr Hammond but momentarily, to give the Countess's letters to Mrs Gifford, who promised to deliver them to her ladyship as soon as she should wake.

About six o'clock the drowsy quiet of the establishment was suddenly and violently broken. Mrs Gifford had taken up her ladyship's tea, and with it her letters, and had scarce been fifteen minutes absent, when she rushed back to the housekeeper's room

exclaiming, 'Oh! Mr Hammond, something dreadful has happened! Run to the stables! My lady says one of the grooms must ride off to London *this moment* for Mr Trafford, and follow him, wherever he is, to bring him down—she is writing him a note—stay,' as the startled butler was leaving the room, 'Giles or Thomas is to take my lord's chestnut with the white foot.'

'What, Miss Kitty!' cried Hammond. 'Her ladyship must be in a fix. I'll send Giles, he knows town best; do you go up for the note.'

Gifford found her lady hastily folding and sealing her brief billet—an open letter of several sheets written in a scrawling hand, lay on the table beside her—Lady Torchester looked pale and agitated, tears stood in her eyes, and her hand trembled as she gave the note to her maid.

'There,' she said in a voice so changed that Gifford started, 'tell the man he must not give it to any one but Mr Trafford himself, he must find out where he is and follow him.'

About an hour after the Countess had despatched her note, two gentlemen sat down to an admirable little dinner in the well-appointed dining-room of a very comfortable suite of apartments in the Albany.

One, a stout grey elderly man, with a high white cravat and some assumption of old-fashioned style in his attire, enough to be eminently respectable without eccentricity. His bushy grey eyebrows overhung quick resentful bright eyes, the keen and somewhat belligerent expression of which was considerably counteracted by a genial mouth and a full under lip. His companion and host was a man about thirty, or perhaps more, tall and slender—slender to leanness, but redeemed by a certain width of shoulder and stately setting on of the head from the sort of insignificance that appertains to leanness. He was dark as a gipsy, with coal-black hair, waving naturally, but thin upon the temples, which had a craggy look; his eyes, though large, were too deep set, he certainly could not be termed handsome; but a look of extreme intelligence, and a smile at times singularly, almost caressingly, sweet, saved him from ugliness. He was clean shaved, except for a fringe of long silky black whisker far back upon the cheek; but both moustache and beard were clearly marked by the blue-black shade on his lip and jaw. He was well dressed in accurate evening costume, and while we are describing him was engaged in cutting a longitudinal slice from a

loin of mutton served saddle fashion—a rich brown juicy slice, with a border of creamy fat.

'I am aware that lamb is the correct thing just now, my dear Bolton,' he said, in a pleasant mellow voice and refined accent, 'but I am sure you have too much good taste not to prefer, as I do, the mature to the immature.'

'Quite right,' replied Bolton with an approving chuckle, 'lamb, and milk and water, and all the rest of it, may suit school-boys and school-girls, but give me the full flavour of ripeness—thank you, thank you, I can come back again. When I was staying at the Knight of Derry's last autumn (our great Irish client you know) they had very first-rate mutton, very exceptional mutton,' with a grave shake of the head—'and they used to serve it with woodcock gravy. That is, a woodcock slightly gone, roasted, the flesh picked off the bones, and rubbed down to thicken the gravy; I never tasted anything finer,' emphatically.

'A good idea; and now, Bolton, what is your dinner wine?'

'Claret, if you have claret; but what with the peculiar vintages and the *vin ordinaire* with which we are flooded now, I scarcely hope to taste claret anywhere save in my own house.'

'I hope you will find mine drinkable.'

'Ah! you decant it; that is a good sign,' as the only servant who waited, a foreign-looking man with heavy moustaches and pierced ears, placed the claret beside him. The banquet proceeded quietly, diversified by occasional remarks on food and its preparation from the elder gentleman, who evidently considered eating a serious occupation. At last he sent away his plate, and suggested cheese, without the intervention of sweets, 'for,' he added, 'having known you from your youth up I take liberties you see.'

'I should think you fairly entitled to so much with me; but cheese will come naturally, for I did not see the necessity of encumbering ourselves with what is termed a "second course."'

'Bah!' rejoined the guest, 'sweets are an abomination, only to be provided for women and idiots.'

'Of course you take port after your cheese? It is so long since we dined together, you see I am not quite sure of your tastes.'

'Port; yes, certainly; and if it is only as good as your claret I shall have dined well.'

'You may leave us, Lemoine,' to the servant, as he placed the wine on the table. 'I can ring when I want you.'

'Where did you get that outlandish fellow?' asked Mr Bolton,

as he leaned back in his chair and sipped his port with an air of grave enjoyment.

'Oh, in Canada—he is a French Canadian; but you must have seen him before; I have had him six or seven years.'

'And pray how many months of those six or seven years have you spent in this great centre of civilisation? Ah! my dear Mr Trafford, it makes me—what shall I say? almost dyspeptic to think of the way in which you are wasting your life and throwing away your chances.'

'I am infinitely obliged for the interest you take in me,' returned Geoffrey Trafford, with just a tinge of sarcasm in his pleasant voice and smile; 'but do you know it seems to me that *you* have wasted your life more than I have?'

'Oh! I know your line of argument, but I don't admit your conclusions. Remember where I started and where you did. Now I have got up almost as high as I wish, and you—excuse me—are really nowhere.'

'But I am thirty-two, and you—excuse me—are—well, let us say fifty-two.'

'And a fraction,' said the elderly gentleman, with a fat laugh. 'I grant you have some time before you, but none to spare, my young friend—none to spare. Besides, though I cannot accuse you of wasting your substance in riotous living (at least the riot never reached my ears), you have managed to get through a large, a very large, amount of money. Now or never you must think, not of retrenchment, but of retrieving your fortunes.'

'Yes,' said Trafford, thoughtfully, as he slowly pulled and stroked one of his black whiskers with the long fine fingers of a slight, well-formed, but sunburnt hand, slight enough almost for a woman, but looking as though they had been used to work of some kind. 'Yes, you startled me yesterday when you showed me the exact state of my affairs. I can't quite remember what I have done with it all, for I protest that I have led a highly virtuous life compared with many—nay most—of my friends. However I have, on the whole, enjoyed myself considerably.'

'But, my dear boy, you haven't above half your capital left, and that will scarce produce you nine hundred a year.'

'Still a fellow can eat, and drink, and dress and travel on that, I suppose?'

'Well he need not starve absolutely; but he is only a poor devil in London! Ah! if you had stuck to your profession you would

have been well on to the woolsack by this time—with the Torchester interest to push you in Parliament and your own ability—for you would have been a first-rate pleader. But it's not too late yet. Old Franklin is well inclined to retire, and a Trafford would be sure to carry Muddleborough against any one.'

'My dear Bolton, Trafford or no Trafford, I could not go in on the Tory interest.'

'Well, if you choose the Liberal side you have a wider field, and there are lots of heiresses among the Rads. What you want is a rich wife and a seat in the House.'

'I abhor Radicals, ay, and heiresses too. There in an innate vulgarity about an heiress.'

'Bah! What *are* you? I do not say you must *believe* so-and-so, but you *must* adopt a party; and as to heiresses, you cannot remember your own mother, or you would not have condemned them wholesale.'

'I *do* remember her,' said Trafford in a low voice.

'Ah! she was a woman such as I never saw before,' continued the other, 'or since. All the rest I ever met were puppets, more or less silly; good to pass away a leisure hour or two, or to help a man's fortunes if they had money, but otherwise nothing—nothing at all.'

'You horrible old heretic! *I* do not think so. If I did I would certainly forswear matrimony; but I am anxious to hear what the scheme is at which you hinted, which is to be safe and lucrative.'

'Here it is,' said Mr Bolton, drawing his chair in closer, 'and remember this is a strictly confidential communication. We have of late years acquired many clients among the greater people of the City; and, as the solicitor is almost necessarily in his client's secrets, I am aware that a new association is about to be formed to carry on one of the oldest and best-established banking businesses in the City. Even to one so ignorant of such matters as you are, the name must be familiar—"Oldham & Garret."'

'Yes, but why the deuce do they take a lot of people into the concern if it pays the original men so well? Of course the name is perfectly familiar to me.'

'Oh, the reasons are all clear and right enough, and once the thing is declared there will be a regular scramble for shares; but I think I have interest enough to secure you sufficient to increase your income very considerably. As to myself, I intend to put every spare pound I can muster in it.'

'I am quite willing to leave it to you, my dear Bolton. You will do infinitely better for me than I could do myself.'

'I wish I could persuade you to take to your profession in earnest. With your connections the law offers a splendid prospect, and'——

His further persuasions were interrupted by the entrance of Trafford's servant with a note.

'From Lady Torchester, Sir, and her servant is waiting an answer.'

'I'll ring,' said Geoffrey Trafford. 'You must excuse me. Ten to one Torchester is in a scrape.'

The letter was very short, and the next moment Trafford exclaimed, 'A mystery! What do you make of this, Bolton?'

'DEAR GEOFFREY,

'For God's sake, come to me at once! and let us strive together to save my son.

'Yours, in the deepest distress,

'H. TORCHESTER.'

'There's something radically wrong here,' said the man of business, screwing up his mouth. 'Lay any money it's a low marriage. Just the sort of misfortune to befall so virtuously brought up a youth! Awkward thing virtue, sometimes! But if he has passed the rubicon there is no help. Ah, those wretched mawworm rascals that got the control of the poor Countess! I wish I had the rewarding of them.'

'Well, I must go to the unhappy mother,' said Trafford, smiling as he rung the bell. 'Take another glass of port; and let us hope it is nothing worse than some error of doctrine; though I fear in that case *I* should not have been summoned.—Who brought this?' he asked when the servant had re-entered.

'Giles, Sir, my lord's groom.'

'Send him up.' After a few questions touching the time taken to ride up from Richmond, Trafford despatched the man to put up his horse, and told Lemoine to call a cab.

'There is a train about eight-thirty or quarter to nine; I shall catch it,' he said to his Mentor, who continued to sip his port and to pick out a fat olive occasionally from the dish. 'Very sorry to have our pleasant *tête-à-tête* suddenly broken up,' he continued, as he drew on a light overcoat to hide his evening dress. 'But I fear

something serious is gone wrong. I feel uneasy on Lady Torchester's account, she is wrapt up in that boy. He is rather a cub, but he has not had fair play.'

'Fair play! No. He has been sedulously prepared to become a dupe, a victim, or a *roué*, or all. However, my dear Mr Trafford, do not forget your own affairs in your kinsmanly sympathies. Do not let the next six months pass without deciding on a career, and then throw yourself into it heart and soul. Meantime turn over what I have suggested, and let me know your decision to-morrow; there is no time to be lost.'

'I shall be with you at twelve and probably consult you about my poor aunt's troubles.'

'Oh! this affair will be in my hands, no doubt, soon—the family solicitor is in the family secrets.'

'Cab at the door, Sir,' said Lemoine, and shaking Bolton's hand warmly, Geoffrey Trafford ran down-stairs.

* * * * *

The Countess of Torchester was pacing to and fro in her luxurious sitting-room, with pale cheeks, clasped hands, and tearful eyes, when 'Mr Trafford' was announced.

The poor lady had known no rest since she had dismissed her messenger more than two hours and a half before, and a deep gloom hung over the household, who from her silence augured some frightful event.

'My dear Geoffrey, you are very good; even my agonised impatience hardly expected you so soon.'

'I certainly lost no time. So sorry to find you in such distress. What's the matter?'

'Read that,' said Lady Torchester, handing him the letter which had caused her so much grief.

'Read it aloud,' she added, sinking into an easy-chair; 'I want to understand it quite.'

So Trafford, with sundry stoppages to decipher the young Earl's hieroglyphics, read as follows:

'My dear Mother,

'I have not written for some time, in fact, I had nothing particular to say. I have been to a good many musical parties among the English people here. I like music better than I used. I have also some French acquaintances—very good fellows—and I can manage to speak French with them a little.

'Now, my dear mother, I must tell you that I have met a young lady—the most charming creature I ever saw! It isn't that she is so handsome, but she is so pleasant and natural; and she has such a stunning figure'——

'A what?' asked the Countess, with a suppressed sob.

'He means a very fine or graceful figure,' explained Trafford, and proceeded:

'I am miserable if she is out of my sight; and she is so good-tempered and jolly that I am sure I shall never find any one else to make me so happy. I think she likes me very much. So I have quite made up my mind to marry her as soon as it can be managed.

'Now I hope, my dear mother, you will not make any objections, as it would distress me very much to marry without your consent, for I am sure no man ever had a better mother than you have been, and you will always find me grateful; but I *must* marry Maggie (her name is Margaret Grey), and I know you will like her very much. I ought to mention, however, that she is an orphan, and has no fortune, but of course that is of no consequence; she is living here with a widow, an Englishwoman, who seems to have adopted her, and gives very nice parties—musical parties. I believe her father was a very distinguished artist (I mean Miss Grey's), but she never bores you about her family, which is so sensible. I dare say worldly cold-hearted fellows like Geoff Trafford and old Bolton will say I am making a fool of myself, but I don't care; and I have heard you too often talk of the hollowness of the world to suppose *you* will care for rank or riches.

'Miss Grey is very religious, goes to church regularly, and all that sort of thing.

'So write to me, dearest mother, and send me a nice message for Maggie. Do not delay, for I should not like to settle everything until I hear from you.

'Your ever affectionate son,

'TORCHESTER.'

Trafford ceased, and looked up at the Countess with an amused smile which he could not repress. But she had covered her face in her handkerchief, and moaned audibly. 'A bad business, my dear aunt, I confess; but we must not give it up without a struggle.'

'Oh, Geoffrey! What an awful blow! Who can she be? Grey? Is there any distinguished artist of that name? No! I thought

not!' as Trafford shook his head. 'An adventuress, who knows—a dependent on this dreadful woman who gives these horrid parties. Surely the Lord has seen fit to try me sorely! From the hour that he came of age Torchester has thrown off my influence. Even at the festivities on his coming of age he would bestow more attention than I wished on those Miss de Braceys, who are so worldly and so bold. And then, Geoffrey, he went off (before he had even examined his minority accounts) with Colonel Molyneux and his sister Lady Gertrude Capel, to some sea-side hovel in Wales, where she had collected a party of the most eccentric people in London (to say the least), and lived out of doors fishing and boating, and dining in the open air, while I had invited my poor cousin Laura Wallscourt's daughter, a charming girl, handsome, well-bred, immensely clever, to stay with me—just to let Torchester see that she was specially fitted to be his wife; and he never returned till near Christmas! I must say he showed me much affection when I was leaving Mount Trafford—dear Mount Trafford!' and the Countess again pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. 'And he wished me to remain there, but I was too anxious to see him well married not to leave the family nest vacant,' said her ladyship, with a sad smile; 'and now,' she added, 'see what a termination to all my care and all my hopes.'

'My dear Countess, it is not terminated yet,' said Trafford in a kindly tone; slightly raising himself in his easy-chair, and, clasping his hands, he rested them on its left arm; the repose of his attitude unbroken by the smallest movement—none of the slight twitches or fidgets from which so few are free, but absolutely still.

'Ah! the good God has sent you to me, Geoffrey,' said Lady Torchester, gratefully. 'But how can I hope? See how resolutely he speaks here,' striking the letter with her finger. 'This unknown girl will reign in my place, and drag my son down with her!'

If we can but gain time,' exclaimed Trafford, starting up with sudden animation and pacing the room. 'You must write to him at once.'

'I will, I will,' cried the poor lady. 'I will tell him that he must expect neither his heavenly Father's blessing nor that of his earthly parent on so unhallowed a union!'

'You must do nothing of the kind,' said Geoffrey, quietly, pausing opposite the Countess, 'if you do not wish him to marry this girl within twelve hours of the receipt of your letter. No, no, you must write a tolerably strong exposition of your affection for him, and readiness to agree to whatever will be for his happiness, but

decline on the score of illness entering more into the subject at present—request him to write more fully, as you are deeply interested in his plans—but commit yourself to nothing. He will then think himself on the high road to secure your consent, and will wait accordingly.'

'But is not this tampering with truth,' asked the poor mother.

'Nonsense, my dear aunt; you must by some means save the boy—there is nothing in the whole catalogue of social ills comparable to a marriage such as this. And you see poor Torchester has by his training learned to look on women as something rather awful, and, certainly, sacred; so there will be much difficulty in dealing with the matter. The all-important point at present is not to scare the game. I had a line from St Lawrence this morning, which inclines me to go to Paris myself, and see what is to be done.'

'Do, dear Geoffrey! Kindest friend! You are my only hope.'

'Then, remember, I must have *carte blanche*, if necessary, to buy off the girl—for I expect to do more with her than with him, and if she is what we imagine, it will not be easy to make her loose her hold of an earl who is his own master and of age.'

'Do anything, anything!' cried the Countess.

'I wonder how old she is;' said Trafford, half to himself; 'age would make a vast difference in such a game. I might make love to her myself,' he added, laughing, 'and sow the seeds of jealousy.'

'You must not be treacherous, Geoffrey! Anything but that. I suppose it would be best to try her with money. I would give her a thousand pounds.'

'That would be a poor exchange for a coronet and fifty thousand a year! But we must do our best. I fear I cannot start till to-morrow night; I have an appointment of importance in the morning, but I will do my utmost for my cousin—even more for *your* sou,' he added with his kindliest smile.

CHAPTER X.

THE day which succeeded the *fête* was one of considerable business with Mrs Berry, and no slight bewilderment to Maggie.

Though fatigued with so much unusual pleasure and excitement, she brought Mrs Berry her accustomed cup of tea, at the usual hour, and to her surprise was met by exclamations expressive of gratitude and admiration. 'My tea already! I declare to goodness, Margaret, I never saw the like of you for kindness and thoughtfulness! To be up and ready, just as if we hadn't been so awfully tired. I declare every bone in *my* body is aching as if I had been beaten with sticks! Sit down, child; take some tea yourself, and let us talk over everything.'

'Thank you; I do not want any tea, but I am quite ready to talk.'

'Come, now, Maggie; tell me everything, from the beginning, how Lord Torchester came here, and what he said, and how you got to Versailles; don't leave out anything.'

'Very well,' replied Maggie, smiling; 'I will begin at the beginning.' And she very faithfully, though concisely, detailed the occurrence, ending with 'There is the whole story, Mrs Berry, and I assure you I should never have gone with Lord Torchester had I not been impressed with the idea that you had sent him for me.'

'Sent his lordship! Not I, indeed! I never thought of such a thing! It never struck me that he was after you. In short,' added the widow, with a sigh, 'I have been thinking of some one else very different; but now, just answer me straightforward—*has* he proposed for you?'

'Proposed for me?' cried Maggie, opening her eyes wide with astonishment, and breaking into a merry laugh. 'What *could* put such an idea into your head? No, of course he has not!'

'But of course he *will*,' returned Mrs Berry oracularly; 'and, Maggie, when you are being presented with a coronet on your brow, and your train trailing yards behind you, you must not forget that you owe it all to *me*, though, indeed, for that matter, I may be a countess by that time, myself.'

'How can you fancy such nonsense?' cried Maggie accustomed

to her friend's romancing on the topics of love and marriage, though infinitely surprised to find a place assigned herself in such brilliant dreams. 'Can you not see that Lord Torchester likes me because he is at ease with me—because I treat him as if he were an English gentleman, not a demigod? He may even be a little *épris*, but to think of marrying me! Why it is *too* ridiculous!'

'I *cannot* make you out, Maggie, whether you are telling me the truth or not; but we'll see. Mark *my* words, that young man is wild about you—and, my goodness! what a beautiful lot of gloves! What a pity you have such a bit of a hand—not one of them will fit me! Now I have fifty things to do to-day. I want to go and see—where is it? give me my purse off the table, Maggie. Yes,' opening it, and extracting a piece of paper, 'Koster and Rico, 49 Place de ———, that's it! These are a Belgium firm, and have a lot of railway shares they can sell very cheap, Madame von Garn was telling me. I must see them to-day; and there is also a sale somewhere near the Porte St Martin, lace, and silks, and velvets, will go dirt cheap. Now you would be of great use to me, Maggie, but if you think the Earl is likely to call to-day, and make you an offer, I shall leave you at home.'

'He will do nothing of the kind. I shall go with *you*,' cried Maggie, decidedly.

'Do as you like; perhaps, if he finds you do not stay at home he will be more eager about you to-morrow.'

'Mrs Berry, you are quite mistaken!'

'Maggie you are a goose. There, get me some hot water--that is, tell Rosalie to bring me some.'

Overpowered by Mrs Berry's mingled entreaties and injunctions, Maggie allowed her to go forth alone on her expedition, but instead of fulfilling her patroness's expectations by putting on her prettiest dress, and setting herself in an elaborate position of non-expectancy, she quietly but quickly set to work to arrange all the litter of finery, and having entered all the items supplied her by Mrs Berry, stole away upstairs, to her old friend the music-master's rooms, where she found that worthy imprisoned by a bad cold, so expended her liberty in reading the journal aloud, and listening to the poor gentleman's complaints.

Lord Torchester sat at breakfast a few mornings after the Versailles expedition, in a very bad humour.

Despite the most persevering efforts, he had never once succeed-

ed in seeing Maggie alone since that day of triumph. Even he felt that such failures could not be the result of accident. Yet why should she avoid him? She could have no objection to him, for though too well accustomed to rank and wealth to give much thought to either, he was quite aware that the Earl of Torchester would be acceptable to most young ladies. Then Miss Grey must see how tremendously fond he was of her.

Here his meditations were most unexpectedly and unpleasantly broken in upon by the entrance of his valet, who announced 'Mr Trafford, my lord.' Whereupon entered the family Mentor, with an easy pleasant smile, looking as fresh as if he had not been travelling all night.

'Well, Torchester, how goes it? Did not expect to see me, eh?'

'No, indeed!' returned the Earl, in anything but a cordial tone. 'When did you arrive? What has brought you here?'

'Oh! I arrived this morning, and I came because I have not seen Paris for more than three years. But if I bore you, or am in your way, why, Meurice's is big enough for both of us.'

And with another kindly, half-amused smile, Geoffrey Trafford drew a chair and sat down opposite his kinsman, who accustomed from boyhood to associate 'Cousin Geoff' with pleasure and indulgence, felt his first instinctive impulse that he would prove an 'obstacle' melt away, and replied in his accustomed manner, 'Why of course I am glad to see you, and certainly we need not interfere with each other! Have some breakfast?'

'My young lord feels he has his head,' thought Trafford. 'Thank you. I have breakfasted,' he said.

'Did you see my mother?' asked Lord Torchester, a little suspiciously, adding, 'and how is she?'

'I had a long talk with her shortly before I left,' wisely omitting the exact date of the interview, 'and she seemed very unwell, but considered herself convalescent. She was alone just then. However, Miss Brandon and that Tooting saint, the man who preaches on some common, were expected.'

'Then she will be quite amused,' said Lord Torchester, feeling more at ease, for he began to hope his mother had not mentioned his matrimonial intentions to the keen man of the world, whose opinion was of no small value in his eyes. 'I hate those Dissenting fellows, and cannot think how my mother can bear them. She must clear the "Beeches" of such rubbish before I go and see her.'

'I suppose your mother may choose her own friends; though I confess they are not lively companions. And now, Tor, how do you like liberty, and Paris? I suppose you are in a whirl of gaiety and excitement? Which do you affect—French or English society? —but I fancy the former is not in your way.'

'I know a little of both—Frenchmen and Englishmen. *You* used to be a great deal here, Geoff.'

'Yes, I once knew Paris *well;* and if you would care for an introduction to some of the "Faubourg" families, I could manage it for you; but I do not think you would care for them. What are you going to do to-night? I see Rose Chéri sings at the "Comique." Shall we dine at the *Trois Frères*, and hear her after?'

'Why, what's to-day—Wednesday? Sorry I can't. Mrs Berry receives to-night, and I generally go there.'

'Then if you generally go you can afford to miss the reception occasionally.'

'No, I would rather not. It amuses me more than the Opera, where I don't understand a word they say. Besides'——Lord Torchester paused, struggling with an unusually rapid flow of ideas. His mother had evidently not said a word about his letter to Geoff. What if he could get Geoff on his side by introducing him to the irresistible Maggie; and there could be no danger of rivalry, for Geoff began to be quite an old fellow—almost wrinkled, thought the Earl, looking down on his cousin's thirty-two years from the arrogant elevation of youth, as he gazed at that gentleman's dark quiet face.

'Besides what?' asked Trafford, after giving him ample time to finish his sentence. 'Who is Mrs Berry, and how do you amuse yourself at her receptions?'

'Mrs Berry is a widow—a woman of fortune, and has very pleasant people at her house. They have music—and cards, and lots of talk—and tea—and—and lots of things,' returned Lord Torchester, running aground in his description.

'Well, I shall consider you very churlish if, after refusing to dine with me, you do not take me with you to this elysium of yours.'

'I don't know,' said the young man, hesitating between a strong desire to introduce his kinsman and a latent unconscious caution. 'I am not so intimate with Mrs Berry'——

'As to introduce a country cousin,' said Trafford, with a smile, filling up the pause. 'Really, Tor, I am afraid you are ashamed of me, I have been so thoroughly rusticated that I suspect I am

not presentable. However, a reproduction of "Valentine and Orson" might be very effective.'

'Don't chaff, old fellow! I'll take you if you like, and we can dine together all the same.'

'Thanks, my lord,' said Trafford, good-humouredly; 'and now how long do you intend to bestow yourself on this sweet sinful capital? Bolton, who confided many griefs to me in a late interview, is most indignant that you have not taken your seat as an hereditary legislator, and gone in for the presidency of the "Muddleborough Agricultural Society."'

'He is an awful bore, that Bolton, and such a hard, selfish, worldly old buffer; but he cannot dictate to me *now*; so he may give it up.'

'He is a shrewd honourable fellow, who amuses himself by an elaborate display of the worst side of his character; at any rate, he possessed and deserved your father's fullest confidence.'

'Oh, yes! of course; let him stick to his parchment, though, and leave my concerns alone.'

'My dear boy, I did not intend to rouse your wrath against Bolton. I assure you his indignation with you is nothing to the vials he poured upon me; but we were always chums, and perhaps he has some right to find fault with me.'

'Why, I have heard that you would be well on to the woolsack by this time, Geoff, if you hadn't been such an idler.'

'No opprobrious epithets, if you please. I have the utmost contempt for an idler, and mine at least has been strenuous idleness. But I shall go to work in earnest one day,' added Trafford, a little thoughtfully, and as if to himself. 'However, I suppose you have breakfasted, and I want to call at the embassy before post time; so I'll leave you. The *Trois Frères* at six, then; and after, you'll have the daring courage to present your country cousin to the charming widow—that's the programme?'

'Oh! Mrs Berry ain't charming; but her house is agreeable—and—you'll see.'

Trafford lit a cigar, and saying, '*Au revoir*,' then left the room.

Lord Torchester looked after his cousin, a proud sense of superiority swelling within him. Geoff little knew that he was on the eve of making so charming a creature his own. Geoff, poor old fellow! had left all the glorious excitement and intoxicating delight of such feelings far behind as he advanced into that arid period called middle age; but he. John George, Earl of Torchester,

young and inexperienced, and crushed by evangelical tyranny as he had been, possessed it all; he had made his way into the land of delight alone, independently. Yes, this achievement was all his own, and all the Boltons and worldlings, and mothers, and Tooting saints in the universe should not hold him back from enjoying it.

Meantime Trafford good-naturedly penned a hasty note to catch the mid-day post and carry some shadow of comfort to the mother's aching heart. 'Things are not at their worst,' he wrote. 'Torchester hesitates to tell me of his entanglement, and I have left him ignorant of my information. He may next voluntarily confide in me, which will be an inch gained. We must remember he is his own master; we cannot coerce him. However, I am to be presented to-night, and shall be able to give you a fuller report to-morrow.' This done, he sallied forth to see what changes three years had wrought in Imperialised Paris, and how far the brilliant society to which he once had the *entrée* was metamorphosed.

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It was the first of Mrs Berry's receptions since the Versailles fête, and the intermediate days had been unusually uncomfortable to Maggie Grey. First, Mrs Berry was very unmanageable under the combined excitement of Lord Torchester's presumed matrimonial intentions towards her *protégée* and her own increasing admiration—nay, adoration—for the accomplished Count; though, had it not been for the bewilderment of this last folly, Maggie would have found it much more difficult to elude the young Earl's pertinacious efforts to procure an interview. Then Monsieur Grenier, the dishevelled genius, had been troublesome and forward, and sent her some impassioned verses—unsigned, it is true; nevertheless, unmistakably his—and she felt an unspeakable dislike—nay, loathing—of him, of which she was half ashamed. Finally, she had caught a severe cold, and, though glad of the excuse it afforded for keeping out of every one's way, it weakened and depressed her.

However, on this eventful Wednesday things looked a little brighter; she was better. Mrs Berry, absorbed in her own affairs, had not mentioned Lord Torchester for almost twenty-four hours, night included; and that young nobleman having been kept at bay for four whole days, Maggie thought it more than probable that his fancy for herself must have partly evaporated, for it was impossible he could be so much in earnest as Mrs Berry represented; and then it would be so pleasant not to have any painful, awkward explanation, but just keep him on as a kindly, friendly acquaint-

ance. Therefore Maggie cheered herself up as she dressed for the evening with almost homely simplicity, the resources of her wardrobe being limited. She had no exquisitely-becoming *soi-disant* invalid's toilette; so, as she still felt the chilling influence of her cold, she stoically buttoned a plain black silk dress from waist to throat, with nothing but a white lace *cravatte* to relieve it; while her head-dress was only 'a bunch of blue ribbons, to tie up her bonnie brown hair;' the result of which was an expression of strong disapprobation from Mrs Berry:

'Goodness gracious! what a dowdy! I declare, Maggie, you're the most contradictory, provoking—why, I'd have lent you my white muslin peignoir with the Malines lace if—but here's the Count, and it can't be helped.'

So Maggie was spared the effort of re-dressing, and placed herself contentedly at her tea-table.

Mrs Berry's visitors were more numerous than usual. The Baroness came early, and was quickly followed by Grenier and one or two of her Polish friends. Then Mrs and Miss Maclaggan, and Lady and Miss Salter, and Mr De Courcy Jones arrived in quick succession, and a little later on, some recent acquaintances—Engishwomen married to Frenchmen, and two or three British 'half-pays,' *habitués* of Paris, passably well-dressed and well-bred, and ready to enter themselves for the 'Berry Stakes,' had the ghost of a chance offered itself—came in. From all these elements of the fair widow's society Maggie felt a curious shrinking—a certainty, which she could neither define nor explain, that they were not *comme il faut*. It was the instinct of a nature utterly true and simply noble against what was false and mean. Nevertheless, quite unconscious of herself and her instincts, Maggie poured out tea, and smiled pleasantly, and exchanged civil nothings with those who came for that beverage; indeed, she felt ashamed of her unamiable feelings towards Miss Salter when that experienced young lady, mindful of the devotion she had witnessed from a real live earl, placed herself persistently at her side, was deeply interested in her cold, and full of regret that she (Maggie) had not sent for her to come and see her or read to her, &c., &c., 'What a horrible nuisance *that* would have been,' thought Maggie ungratefully, as she made proper and polite replies.

'Do you expect Lord Torchester this evening,' said Miss Salter, in conclusion.

'I am sure I don't know,' replied Maggie, in all sincerity; and

as she spoke his lordship appeared through the curtains which draped the doorway, between the *salle à manger* and the *salon*.

Maggie was infinitely disgusted to feel herself blushing vividly; and yet she was pleased to see 'the boy,' as she called him, in her own mind. There was something honest and manly about him that comforted her; and the young Earl, as he marked the heightened colour and look of unmistakable welcome in her soft grey eyes, felt his heart swell with pride and joy beyond what mere words could tell; nevertheless he could say no more than 'How's your cold, Miss Grey?' and then the discreet Selina moved away. 'Were you really so ill that you couldn't see me?' continued Lord Torchester, gathering courage as Miss Salter vanished.

'Well, I could have managed to have come down and spoken to you if there was any great necessity; but really I have been very very unwell, and do not feel worth much now.'

'Worth!' repeated the Earl, with expressive emphasis; but while he spoke Mrs Berry came in with a gentleman—a tall, slight gentleman, dark as a gipsy, and dressed with the ineffable perfection that only a first-class London tailor can produce.

As he spoke to the captivating widow, he smiled a smile so sweet and frank, showing such an even row of white teeth, that it would be hard to say which he was, plain or handsome.

'Well,' said Mrs Berry, as if in continuance of a sentence or reply, 'since you are such an Englishman, Miss Grey will give you a cup of tea, and Lord Torchester will introduce you;' so saying, she returned to the *salon* and the Count.

'This is my cousin, Mr Trafford, Geoff Trafford,' said the Earl, presenting him to poor Maggie, who felt suddenly and strangely afraid of the dark, deep-set eyes turned so inquiringly upon her. She, however, retained sufficient self-possession to smile, bow, and offer the never-failing cup of tea. 'Geoff's a great friend of mine—a capital fellow,' continued Lord Torchester, inspired by a sense of his own importance, suggested by Maggie's blush and unconscious look of welcome. 'He took me by surprise this morning at breakfast when I thought he was in Nova Zembla or Norway, or the Lord knows where. He is always wandering about, Miss Grey.'

'Indeed!' said Maggie, looking up with a smile, and a bright blush, as she met the same inquiring but not unkindly expression in the deep eyes that dwelt upon her so steadily.

'You must know,' the Earl went on, 'that Geoffrey Trafford is a mighty hunter, an angler, and a great shot.'

Maggie in heart did not wonder that such an eye should insure a successful aim, but she limited her spoken remarks to an inquiry as to the amount of sugar he required, and if he liked cream? Yes, Mr Trafford liked cream and sugar, and everything soft and sweet. He drew a chair beside the gentle tea-maker—to his cousin's no small disgust—for the Earl somehow expected every one to make way for him, though he would have been greatly surprised had any one drawn his attention to this phase of his character.

Nevertheless Geoff Trafford sat on sipping his tea, talking easily and pleasantly, making Lord Torchester talk also, and better than usual; he bestowed some pains, too, to draw out Maggie, but with no great success, for she felt dull and sad. This apparition of Lord Torchester's high-bred cousin with his tranquil air of unapproachable superiority seemed to raise a sudden barrier between her and her youthful admirer, whose honest kindness had become a sort of stay to her, which made him very welcome as a friend, however unacceptable as a lover, and in neither character did she quite like to have him taken from her, so she listened to Trafford's agreeably-turned phrases and well-put questions with a little under-current of dislike.

'He is cold and cynical, and despises us heartily, under all his good breeding,' she thought. 'And what business has he to do so? he is no better himself, I dare say;' and still she felt he was leagues removed from the Greniers and De Bragances of Mrs Berry's society.

'Isn't it a shame, Geoff,' said Lord Torchester, *apropos* of some remarks respecting the coming races in the Bois de Boulogne, 'Miss Grey will not ride, though I have offered her Sultan whenever she likes; he is a perfect lady's horse.'

'How can you resist, Miss Grey?' asked Trafford; 'you are not afraid? You do not look like a coward.'

'I hardly know if I am or am not,' said Maggie; 'but as to riding, it is simply out of the question. I dare say it is very pleasant, but one of the pleasures that do not exist for me.'

'You are not so sure of that,' said Lord Torchester, so significantly that Maggie coloured deeply with a look of much annoyance, as she fancied she could observe Mr Trafford watching his young kinsman with a slightly amused air.

'If you will not take any more tea,' she said rising, 'I shall go

into the next room. It is very warm here.' She led the way to the *salon*, where a couple of card tables boasted the usual devotees, whose wrapt attention was all unruffled by the loud buzz of talk and laughter which filled the room.

'Margaret,' exclaimed Mrs Berry, 'I just wanted you to accompany me in "Ma Normandie." Monsieur Kockanowska has been teasing me this half-hour to sing it, and there's the Count nailed to the whist table by that tiresome old Mac and Mr De Courcy Jones. Oh! dear, Mr Trafford, are you devoted to cards like all the rest of the gentlemen? The only one who has any sense on the subject is my lord here; but he is young enough to like the ladies best. Eh, my lord?'

'Torchester always had excellent taste,' replied Trafford gravely. 'Yet I fancy he is not quite averse to try his skill and luck against other men, in which I rather think lies the charm of gambling.'

Lord Torchester looked uneasy. 'Gambling is one thing, and playing cards is another,' he said.

'Next door neighbours, my dear fellow,' returned Trafford carelessly.

'Would you like to cut in yourself, Mr Trafford? asked Mrs Berry. 'They have nearly finished the rub at the Baroness' table, and I dare say the Count has had enough.'

'After you have sung,' said Trafford, with a bow. 'It is some time since I played. I have been away in North America and Norway, and generally out of the pale of civilisation, so you must excuse my many deficiencies.' As he spoke, he stooped to raise some music Maggie had let fall, and placed it before her; while he did so, De Bragance called out in his clear metallic tones, 'Come, milord, have you no worship to spare from Cupid to Fortune? Have you quite deserted your old habits and pastimes?'

'Not quite,' returned the Earl, moving towards him. And Maggie looking up at that moment, met Trafford's eyes, and shook her head with such a meaning glance, that Geoffrey suddenly took an interest in the whist-table, and was soon deep in council with the Baroness, and backing her with small bets against Mr De Courcy Jones, who, to Mrs Berry's disappointment, was the one who cut out at the end of the rubber.

To Maggie the evening was wearisome and sad. This new comer, the Earl's kinsman, seemed to bode her no good, and she felt a presentiment that a change was coming in her fortunes, and that a painful one.

CHAPTER XI.

When Trafford inquired for Lord Torchester the next morning, he found that his lordship had already breakfasted and gone out to ride, so the prime counsellor sat down to discuss his coffee and omelet alone. While he ate, he reflected on the task he had undertaken, and the new lights breaking in upon it. It was more difficult than he anticipated, but from unlooked-for causes. While the Earl kept his own counsel, what possible right had he, Geoffrey, to interfere or to offer advice? Then, if there was any objectionable point about the lady to lay hold of, he might introduce the thin end of the wedge; but there was none; a sweeter, honester face he had seldom looked at; altogether a modest, well-bred young gentlewoman, he thought, smiling at the old-fashioned words which suggested themselves to his imagination, as he conjured up Maggie's figure and countenance with wonderful clearness. 'The young cub's taste is not so bad,' he mused, 'and circumstances apart, I dare say she is a great deal too good for him. However, the chance of her innate superiority saving the house of Trafford from a *mésalliance* is not to be trusted, and I see no way of interfering legitimately but to make love to her myself, and it is so long since I played any game of that kind that I fear my hand is out. Nevertheless, I'll try;' and Trafford musingly pulled his long whiskers, and thought how he should manage to cut out the Earl, yet not to make too deep an impression on his *inamorata*. The whole set surrounding his cousin were highly objectionable. 'Sharpers every one of them, except that tall over-dressed widow and her quiet *protégée*. I fancy these women have been the salvation of poor Tor's pocket at all events, and kept him out of worse mischief—so his future depends on this pale simple girl; for if he contrives to propose, and she accepts, why kinsmen, counsellors, mother and all, may throw their caps at it; there will be no holding him back.'

Meantime the unconscious object of these meditations was undergoing a severe morning's exercise with her mistress over the month's accounts. 'Why, Maggie, I had no idea that these little receptions cost so much. I declare the last month is near double what the one before cost.'

'Well, Mrs Berry, you *would* have claret and Frontignac latterly, and then so many more people come.'

'Ay, that's true,' returned the widow complacently. 'I don't think there are receptions better attended, or by more elegant people, than mine. I don't care who the other is,' concluded Mrs Berry, defiantly.

'They are very nice indeed,' said Maggie, 'though they are rather costly. Shall you go on having these receptions?'

'Yes, of course! Why I might as well quit Paris as give them up! I'd be just nowhere!—and now, Maggie, do tell truth—has the Earl proposed to you?'

'No, Mrs Berry—certainly not—and I am sure he never will. Why, can't you see how improbable it is that he would offend his mother and every one for the sake of a girl he knows so little—a girl in such a different position? It is quite ridiculous to think of it.'

'Then, in my opinion, he is acting in a very dishonourable manner,' returned Mrs Berry, in a severely virtuous tone. 'Why does he keep coming here, and winning your young affections, if he doesn't mean it?—it isn't right.'

'My young affections are a long way out of his reach,' said Maggie, with a pretty saucy pout. 'What woman could fall in love with an unfledged boy like Lord Torchester? That is all nonsense!'

'Well, Margaret Grey! I declare a more unsatisfactory, disappointing, and I must say ungrateful girl, never existed. There never was such another chance offered to a poor thing that was, in a manner of speaking, just a drudge with that horrid old skinflint, your aunt. Haven't you a bit of pride even?—to think of the triumph it would be to drive past your uncle's old shop in your coroneted carriage, with your powdered footmen behind you.'

'No, I have not,' replied Maggie, stoutly. 'I would much rather marry some nice kind man no grander than myself, who would let me have my dear good uncle to dinner or tea whenever I liked—slippers and all.'

'Why, Maggie, what a goose you are! Don't you know that, lords or commons, all men are pretty much the same for hating their wives' relations, and you'd have as little chance of that sort of thing with a pedlar as a peer. Come now, don't be a fool! Give that nice sweet young man his way. Don't cry out till you are hurt, nor refuse till you are asked—and as sure as you give

Lord Torchester the cold shoulder he'll be off to some of the grand ladies as will jump at him, and then no one will never believe but that he was just tired and left you of his own accord,' concluded Mrs Berry, crowding her negatives with reckless energy. 'So do now, for my sake, Maggie, let things go on as they are! You'll like him better the more you see of him—and—and it would be such a pity to let him go away just as my parties are getting all the fashion! So you won't snub him, will you, Maggie?'

'No, I like him too well! but I don't think he will trouble me with any proposals, and I cannot help fancying this Mr Trafford will do his best to set his cousin against me, and you, and every one.'

'Do you now?—really!—that's very funny! I am sure I never saw a more elegant man—Englishman I should say—so polite, and pleasant, and good-looking—Yes!—No!—Well, not handsome exactly.'

'No, I should think not!' cried Maggie, decidedly. 'Why, when he is not smiling he is quite plain; even his smile seems as much at as with you.'

'Well, I'm sure,' cried Mrs Berry, her drowning hopes catching at any straw, 'I wouldn't let a man like that come between me and such an elegant charming young nobleman as Lord Torchester. Eh, Maggie?'

'Oh, Mrs Berry, never mind—do let us talk of something else,' cried Maggie, wearied out of patience.

'Very well,' returned the widow, anxious to win her important *protégée* to acquiescence in her ambitious views; 'and I have a nice surprise for you. You know the grand ball that is to be given at the Hôtel de Ville on the 20th?—and everybody is just dying for tickets! Well, the Baroness has undertaken to get me two; I'll have to pay for them, but that is neither here nor there; and I'm going to take *you*, and give you a *new dress*.'

Mrs Berry stopped abruptly, to allow for a proper outbreak of Maggie's feelings, and that inconsiderate but very natural young person did start up from her seat with heightened colour and dancing eyes, and clasped Mrs Berry's hand.

'Surprise!—Yes, it is indeed? How good—how very good of you to give me such a treat!—and a new dress! Why, Mrs Berry, I feel as if I could do anything for you—even marry Lord Torchester to-morrow. No! really, you are wonderfully good to me!—but are you sure of the tickets?'

'Yes, quite sure. Now, Maggie, I do hope you will not keep contradicting and aggravating me any more, for no one ever could have your interest more at heart than I have. Now, come, it's early yet; let us go round to Madame Bénoi's, and see what we can get the dress for; there's my white silk slip, not my second best one, the one before that, it is scarce soiled, and that will be a great help—go, get on your bonnet, and we'll see what we can do before people begin to get about.'

This delightful surprise sufficed to banish Maggie's care and troubles very successfully. It is not in the nature of nineteen to think of doubts and difficulties with a new dress and a brilliant ball in immediate expectancy, and so she entered heart and soul into the discussion with the shrewd *modiste*, who took a true French artistic pleasure in devising something fresh and suitable for such a sweet simple-looking subject; at last a white cloudy gauze, all flecked over with silver sparks, which somehow or other had lain a long time on hand from some change of fashion, was fixed on, the price fiercely battled over, and finally arranged, and then Madame produced some exquisite bouquets of violets and moss, with trailing leaves of water-plants, so cunningly devised that Maggie could not refrain from a little cry of admiration.

'Law, Madame, they'll cost a fortune,' said Mrs Berry.

'*Tenez*,' replied that professor, holding them against Maggie's soft brown hair and fresh young cheek; '*ça sera une coiffure de fée*. Mademoiselle, your sister will be charming thus, with a freshness and simplicity altogether delicious. Nothing can surpass it.'

'What, then, will the whole come to?' asked the widow, hesitating, while Maggie listened breathlessly for her decision—and, presto! the battle raged again. A *franc* advanced on one side, a *cinquante* renounced on the other. A final sigh of decision, 'It will be a lot of money, but I suppose I must have them.'

'Without doubt; these bouquets were made for the dress, and the whole for Mademoiselle,' &c., &c.

'There, now, Maggie,' said Mrs Berry as they walked back, choosing the shady sides of the streets. 'I have laid out a small fortune for you this morning; mind you don't forget all you owe to me when you are rolling in splendour.'

'My dear Mrs Berry, you shall always have my hearty gratitude,' cried Maggie; 'and I fear that will be your only reward, but,' she continued, colouring with eagerness, 'I do hope you will keep my next quarter's allowance, all except a few shillings, I cannot quite

do without, to help you to pay for this beautiful dress. I should be so pleased. You will, will you not?'

'Well, we'll see about it,' returned Mrs Berry, not reluctant to have this subsidy to fall back upon, in case the object of her unwonted outlay was defeated. 'And now I must see about my own dress; I have chosen such a lovely rose brocade at Delvigne's, and those point d'Alençon flounces I picked up such a bargain will look quite splendid. I must say I do want to look well. Now, I'll go in and have a morsel of lunch, and then I must go to Delvigne's and have my dress tried on.'

On arriving at home, Rosalie informed them that '*ce jeune milord*' was reading in the *salon*.

'Indeed!' cried the widow; 'how kind and friendly of him!' And she bustled in without allowing time for poor Maggie to put in a word. She felt compelled to follow, though feeling sorely embarrassed.

'How d'ye do, Lord Torchester; I'm sure I am very glad you came in and waited for us; for what with drives and shopping, and those tiresome galleries, one scarce has time to speak to their friends. Now do sit down, and what will you take?'

'Oh, nothing, thank you, Mrs Berry. I haven't long done breakfast. How do you do, Miss Grey? How early you are! I thought I would find you at breakfast?'

'We were trying to get through a little shopping in good time, and indeed I have not half done yet, so I'm sure your lordship will excuse me, as I must go out again; but you may as well stay and have a chat with Maggie, in the cool here—these rooms are nice and cool, ain't they?'

'Deliciously cool,' said his lordship, a little flurried with the widow's delightful suggestion, 'the nicest rooms I know.' Maggie started, blushed, looked imploringly at Mrs Berry, but made no resistance; how could she in the face of her protectress's munificent conduct of scarce half an hour ago?

'I suppose you are not going far?' she said, timidly.

'No,' replied Mrs Berry, 'only to Delvigne's to have my dress tried on;' and with a pleasant smile and encouraging nod the widow went her way, calling for 'Rosalie' as she went, but no Rosalie was forthcoming, so Mrs Berry let herself out.

A somewhat embarrassing silence followed Mrs Berry's departure from the *salon*, which Maggie at last broke. 'It is getting quite like summer,' she said, removing her bonnet, and smoothing

back her hair. 'I wonder you do not hurry away to your country home in England, or some such shady, leafy place?'

'I have no such idea. It would take a great deal to draw me away from Paris *now*,' significantly. 'You are not tired of it, are you?'

'Oh, no! and there would be no use if I were; but isn't Mrs Berry good?' (the great news could no longer be kept to herself)—'she is going to take me to the ball at the Hôtel de Ville; won't that be delightful?'

'Well, I suppose she would hardly think of going without you?'

'Oh yes, of course, she often goes to all sorts of places without me; but this is so delightful, and I never was at a ball in my life—I suppose you have often?'

'Not so often. I was at two or three last winter in the country; but I did not care much for them—you see I can't dance.'

'Oh!' said Maggie. 'Why don't you try? I am sure you could; I cannot believe you could not. It seems as natural to dance as to breathe to me.'

'I dare say it does,' replied her companion, admiringly; 'but then you and I are very different. 'I say, how jolly it is to be here quietly with you. I began to think I should never see you again—by yourself, I mean,' and Lord Torchester coloured at his own audacity.

'Yes, it is always nice to be quiet,' said Maggie vaguely, and, opening her work-basket in the exigency of the moment, drew out an elaborate piece of lace work suited for a drawing-room occupation. Prolonged pause, even more embarrassing than the first. Lord Torchester revolves many modes of addressing his beloved, even thinks of going down on his knees right off, but on reflection rejects all

'I suppose you are going to this ball?' asked Maggie, tremulous with anxiety to lead the conversation her own way.

'Yes—that is, I think the Embassy people said they had an invitation for me.'

'I hope you will go,' said Maggie, imprudently.

'Do you—do you indeed?' cried Lord Torchester, brightening up and suddenly making an alarming approach to a chair beside her. 'I say, Maggie—Miss Grey—do you really care whether I go or not, although I don't dance or—or anything, eh?'

'Yes, Lord Torchester, of course I do'—rather nervously. 'I

seem to know you better than any of the others, and you have always been very good to me.'

'I good to you?' said the young man in honest surprise, which spoke well for his innate chivalry. 'I wish *you* would be good to me.'

'That is quite different,' returned Maggie, gravely, collecting her senses, and resolved, if possible, to bring the Earl to his. 'It is out of all rule that you and I should ever have met; and when a man of your rank gives himself some trouble to add to the amusement or enjoyment of a girl so far from him in social position, he deserves a kindly and grateful recollection when they naturally drift apart again.'

'Why, Maggie (do let me call you Maggie) you talk like a book—a novel, by Jove—but as to drifting apart, I've no notion of anything of the sort unless you insist upon it, and I don't see why you should. Look here now,' and he caught her hand with a sudden audacity, astonishing to himself. 'Look here, I am my own master, and'—

'Monsieur Traffore?' screamed Rosalie at the top of her voice, and enter Trafford, cool, well-dressed, keen-eyed, with the suspicion of an amused smile in the corner of his mouth.

The disappointed Earl consigned his intrusive kinsman to regions down below, as he felt the decisive moment slip from his grasp.

'Just in time, and no more,' thought Geoff Trafford, as he noticed the Earl's frantic effort to push back his chair from its telltale proximity, which prudent move was frustrated by a little island of carpet, against which the leg stuck with maddening obstinacy. 'Good morning, Miss Grey. How do, Torchester? Lucky to find you. How cool and comfortable you look here!'

Lord Torchester was crimson with embarrassment and anger.

'Mrs Berry is out,' said Maggie. 'Just gone out.'

'Well, I was informed she was at home,' returned Trafford, 'or I should not have intruded.'

'I am very happy to see you,' said Maggie, and her voice sounded sincere, for Trafford's entrance had been a great deliverance to her.

'And what did you want with me,' asked Lord Torchester, sulkily.

'To ask you to keep this evening free if you have not already disposed of it. For I have promised to present you to Madame de Beaumanoir, and I think you would not be sorry to have the

entrée of her house; besides Madame la Marquise herself is very charming.'

'I don't want to know her, and I don't care a straw about her house. How did you pick her up? You have been scarcely forty-eight hours in Paris,' returned Lord Torchester, sulkily.

'She is an old friend of mine, and yesterday I improved the shining hour by calling on her, and this morning received permission to present you. You must come, it will be an education for you, Torchester.

'Education! Come, Geoff, I think that's a little too strong. You must remember I am no raw schoolboy to be snubbed *now*.'

'I am well aware you have aspirations far beyond that unfledged condition,' said Trafford, quite unmoved by his cousin's wrath, and with a dreadfully meaning smile,—'However, if La belle Marquise had not heard of you as a very different animal from a raw schoolboy, she would not have cared much to make your acquaintance.'

'And pray what could she hear of me?' (still sulkily, but with the deep under-current of selfish conceit just stirred).

'Oh, that you are a desperate gambler and a wonderfully unprincipled flirt, your age and opportunities considered.'

The Earl opened his eyes to their widest extent and flushed even more crimson than before. 'Who—who has dared to say such things of me? It's that fellow Grenier. I'll break every bone in his skin.'

'Grenier? Is that the literary gentleman who was here last night, who has evidently a sworn enmity to barbers?'

'Yes,' put in Maggie, half interested, half amused.

'My dear fellow,' pursued Trafford, 'do you really think such men as Grenier, De Bragance, or that Pole, could possibly have access to Madame de Beaumanoir? No, no. Seriously, you should not put yourself out about such trifles. Come and see la Marquise, you'll make it all right with her in a few minutes. Besides, what are you going to do to-night?'

'And I am sure,' said Maggie, looking up from her work with a sort of sisterly familiarity of which she was unconscious, though it was almost startling to Trafford—'I am sure it is much better for you to spend an evening with such a charming person as this lady must be, than in playing cards with that horrid M. De Bragance.'

If Maggie had searched her brains for a week she could not have hit on a speech more aggravating to her adorer.

'There,' said Trafford with mock triumph; 'you see Miss Grey, with all her experience, is of my opinion.'

The Earl, too hurt and angry to speak, rose up, walked to the window, and looked upon the gay street beneath without seeing it. What an infernal nuisance Geoff was making of himself! What business had he to interfere? Yet how the deuce was his interference to be resented or avoided? And then he felt maddened to hear Maggie speaking pleasantly and composedly of the weather or some such thing. He would go away and not see her for a week, and that would bring her to her senses, for it was impossible she could be quite indifferent.

'Come,' said he stiffly to his cousin, 'I am going; I think we have intruded long enough on Miss Grey.'

'Sorry I cannot go with you, but I particularly want to see Mrs Berry,' replied Trafford. 'Shall we meet at dinner?'

'No,' said Lord Torchester almost rudely; 'I dine with St Lawrence.'

'Then we *shall* meet,' rejoined his provoking cousin, 'for I have just promised little Alf to join him at Véfour's.'

'Humph! Good morning, Miss Grey,' said the Earl gruffly; and, without noticing the hand she held out, he left the room.

As the door closed on the retreating peer, Maggie's eyes met those of Trafford, to which an expression of amused mischief lent a sudden youth, and an irrepressible smile broke over her face; not only did the soft red lips curve and part, but eyes and brow and cheek—every line of the speaking countenance—smiled with thorough appreciation of Trafford's game, who, struck by the piquancy of this recognition, leant forward towards her, resting his elbow on the table at which she sat.

'I am afraid, Miss Grey, you have far too much *diablerie* for so young a lady,' he said with the soft sweet smile which changed his face so wonderfully.

'No, I have not,' returned Maggie, dropping her work and hands into her lap and laughing outright; 'but who *could* help laughing? Indeed, I think it is *you* who have the *diablerie*. How could you tease him so? I am afraid you are very ill-natured.'

Now, it was a strong indication that Trafford could not quite make up his mind to think this insignificant little girl a mere adventuress when, instead of saying, 'I wanted to get rid of him that I might have you all to myself,' he simply replied:

'He is such a spoilt child, I think it my duty to bully him occasionally.'

'Yes, he is rather spoilt,' said Maggie thoughtfully, and resuming her work; 'but he is very good, and he will be better by-and-by.'

'Like sound wine, he will mellow with time?'

'Exactly. I suppose it is only unsound things that time injures?'

'I'm afraid, then, that unsound things form a large category,' rejoined Trafford. 'So that lucky young cousin of mine has found favour in your eyes?'

'He has,' said Maggie, with quiet mischief, laying her lace pattern on the table and studying its effect.

'Has the little witch made up her mind to be a countess?' thought Trafford; 'or is she presuming to chaff *me?*'

'It is generally the happy lot of unencumbered young noblemen to find favour in the eyes of discriminating young ladies,' he said in a pleasant voice, that somewhat nullified the impertinence of his speech.

'It is not because he is an unencumbered young nobleman *I* like him,' replied Maggie without the slightest heat, 'but because he is so like my cousin John.'

'Indeed! Nevertheless, Torchester is lucky in being the *locum tenens* of this favourite relative.'

'Is he?' said Maggie quietly, and resumed her lace work with every appearance of profound interest.

'Still,' continued Trafford, after a short pause, 'I don't think that sort of thing would satisfy me. I should not like any temporary position; I crave a place of my own, were it even *au troisième.* And may I ask in what the likeness between your cousin and mine consists?'

'Oh, in a great many ways! John is as tall, but plainer and more awkward than Lord Torchester. Then he has the same coloured hair, and he is very shy; but he is honest and in earnest, though he cannot talk well. Then both he and Lord Torchester have always been very, very kind to me; so, as I have never had many friends, I somehow seem to put them together in my heart—I mean, my mind' (blushing at her mistake), 'though perhaps no one else could see the likeness.'

'What a dangerous little devil!' thought Trafford as he noticed her quick blush and the sweet tinge of pathos in her tone. 'If she shows that young cub any of this feeling it's all up with the poor

mother.' However, he only said: 'So Torchester shines with a borrowed light?'

'Not altogether,' said Maggie slowly, as she laid her 'lacet round a bend of the pattern. 'I like Lord Torchester for his own sake now.'

'Candid,' thought Geoffrey.

'But,' pursued Maggie, 'I am afraid Mrs Berry will be a long time away; she is gone to the Rue Richelieu to have a dress tried on. I do not know when she may be back.'

'I accept the hint, Miss Grey, and will disappear accordingly.'

'Indeed, I did not mean to give you any hint,' cried Maggie, blushing brightly, and feeling by no means anxious to get rid of her companion, whose easy, kindly badinage and pleasant voice were certainly preferable to solitude.

'It sounded very like a hint,' said Trafford, an amused smile glittering in his eyes, but making no attempt to quit his comfortable seat. 'However, if you wish me to remain, I will.'

'And if *you* wish to remain, you may,' returned Maggie gaily, feeling wonderfully at ease with Lord Torchester's cousin, supported, no doubt, by the delightful consciousness that, come what might—whether she pleased the fancy or offended the taste of all the fine gentlemen in Paris—*the* ball was still before her.'

'I decidedly wish to remain,' said Trafford, almost surprised at the sincerity of the wish and the very deep sense of satisfaction he experienced lounging in the cool shady room, redolent of violets and verbena, contemplating the simple grace of Maggie's round, pliant figure, listening to her fresh young voice, and lazily watching her little white hands, as they plied the needle. Gradually he lost sight of one part of his self-imposed mission; he ceased to watch for indications of Miss Grey's feelings and intentions towards the captive Earl; but I am not sure that he relinquished his intention to cut out that young gentleman. Still, a bench of bishops—nay, a bench of *chaperones*—might have heard the conversation without a frown. Maggie asked questions about Trafford's wanderings, and he answered amusingly—even picturesquely—and Maggie caught herself more than once dropping her work in her lap and gazing with interest into his dark face.

At last the *pendule* on the mantelpiece chimed half-past three, whereupon Miss Grey deliberately folded up her work and said:

'I shall give you no hint, Mr Trafford, but just say at once that

I must leave you, though I would rather stay and listen to your delightful stories.'

'Then why do you impose on yourself the penance of relinquishing my delightful society?' he asked with good-humoured raillery.

'Because I go to read the journal to poor old Monsieur Du Val every afternoon when I can, and I should not like to disappoint him.'

'Who is Monsieur Du Val, and what has he done to be so petted?

'He is Mrs Berry's music-master and lives *au cinquième.* He has had a bad cold and inflamed eyes, and as he can scarcely live without the newspaper, I go and read to him whenever Mrs Berry doesn't want me. He is such a Republican, it would frighten you to hear him talk of the Emperor.'

'Well, I foresee that Torchester and I will have to rescue you from the police when these "red" friends of yours mature their plots! I see an awful vista before you.'

Maggie laughed merrily. 'Be that as it may, I will not disappoint poor Monsieur Du Val. He has been very kind to me; and even without that I like to be of use to him; think what it must be, to be old and ill, and poor and lonely. It is not as if he were a selfish old bachelor. He had a wife and a daughter, but both were carried off by cholera; so you can understand his being unhappy and cross;' as she uttered these sentences with loving pity in her tones she placed her work in its basket and stood up.

'*Missa est,*' said Trafford, submissively, 'and I will retire. Really, Miss Grey, you are very puzzling. I began my visit by thinking you had too much *diablerie.* Now I find myself looking for the embryo wings which shall by-and-by waft you far away above such sublunary beings as—Torchester and myself.'

'Oh, Mr Trafford, you laugh at everything, yet I do not think you are ill-natured *au fond;* and I am sure Lord Torchester is not.'

'Lucky boy to have such a sponsor,' said Trafford, laughing, and with a courtly bow he said 'Good morning,' and departed.

'What a pleasant-well bred person,' thought Maggie, as she went slowly towards the kitchen to inform Rosalie of her whereabouts, 'but very clever—rather too clever to believe in anything—still it is very pleasant to hear him talk.'

And the 'pleasant well-bred person' strolled slowly up the Champs Elysées till he reached a well-shaded seat, whereupon he

placed himself, and drawing his hat over his eyes fell into a fit of musing.

CHAPTER XII.

Lord Torchester was so far true to his resolution that he did not repeat his visit for four whole days, and in the interim only saw the adored one once—in the Tuileries Gardens—and that by accident. The Earl was accompanied by his kinsman, and although he had apparently fallen into the trap which that astute person had baited with the Marquise De Beaumanoir, the sight of Maggie at once restored her influence.

Mrs Berry was, therefore, beatified by the attendance of the Earl and his distinguished-looking cousin, to say nothing of the smiles and greetings of aristocratic individuals, male and female, bestowed on these gentlemen, the largest share of this notice falling to Mr Trafford's lot.

But in spite of these interruptions he remained steadily in their train, and although he did not torment his cousin as much as on a former occasion he was equally amusing and agreeable. Still Maggie felt through it all he was watching Lord Torchester, and that with a view to frustrate the excellent young nobleman's hopes or intentions. Need we add that with such a stimulus Maggie would have been more or less than woman had she not smiled with unusual sweetness upon her admirer, and generally conducted herself so as to convince him that she had noticed and deplored his absence? Altogether it was a pleasant afternoon. The gardens were still fresh, the band inspiriting, the company delightful—and no place had charmed Maggie like Paris.

However all things were merged in the anticipation of, and anxious preparation for, the great ball.

And the thrilling moment came at last.

'Upon my word, Maggie, you do look well!' cried Mrs Berry, when, having partly assisted to attire her patroness, Maggie, after a short retirement, reappeared radiant with an innocent visible delight. Her cloudy dress, fresh cool-looking bouquets of moss and

violets, and the long leaves, sparkling as if with dew, intertwined with her soft brown hair, and drooping on her shoulder, gave her a wood-nymph air, very charming and perfectly suitable to her style.

'And I must say,' continued the approving widow, 'that I don't consider my money thrown away. I'm sure you might be an earl's daughter to look at you. Dear, dear! to think of the poor little creature you were when *I* took you up, without a stitch in the world but a brown stuff frock. And now going to marry an earl—and all through me! I suppose you hardly know which you are, on your head or your heels. What beautiful flowers they are!—my lord's, I suppose?'

'Yes, I suppose so,' returned Maggie, now quite accustomed to this allotment. 'There were such a quantity you see I have divided them. Madame Bénoi cut my dress so dreadfully low I was glad to fill it up with some.'

'At any rate she has turned you out first-rate. If my lord doesn't make you an offer to-night he never will.'

Maggie laughed. 'Do not count on it,' she said.

'Now then,' cried Mrs Berry, 'what do you think of *me?*'

'Your dress is splendid,' replied Maggie, adding in all sincerity, 'I never saw you look so well.'

'That's right,' returned the widow with intense satisfaction. 'I do want to look well. To tell you the truth, Maggie—for I keep nothing from you—I can't understand the Count. He has been keeping away the last week, and has been quite queer. Now I am sure he'll be at the Hôtel de Ville to-night, and I want to show him that I am not to be sneezed at, in short.'

Maggie shook her head, and was about to be guilty of some words of wisdom, when the carriage was announced. Then came an interlude of darkness and driving before the long rank was reached, and that strange, and to novoices thrilling, mode of progress enforced—a few steps forward, a halt, a vibration of the springs, and so on *da capo*.

At last they alighted. Maggie, dazzled and more than half-frightened by the noise, the crowd, the brilliancy, the military aspect which all French fêtes present, clung to Mrs Berry's arm while they waited in an appointed corner the arrival of Mr, Mrs, and Miss Maclaggan, who with Lady and Miss Salter were to form their party.

'Surely,' thought the *débutante*, 'no one can possibly be found

in such a crowd,' and her anticipations of delight and dancing suddenly collapsed. Nevertheless the expected quintette made their appearance. The Maclaggan, magnificent in Highland costume, point ruffles, an eagle's feather, and all the barbarous finery of that rather savage splendour, their number further strengthened by one of the presentable half-pays. A procession was immediately formed, Maggie bringing up the rear on Mrs Maclaggan's arm, bewildered by the beauty and magnificence of the scene. The superb hall glittering with lights, and uniforms scarcely second in their gorgeous solidity to the brilliant costumes of the women; the fairy-like staircase, with its crimson carpet ascending between two marvellously natural cascades flowing and murmuring down a gentle incline, wet stones, moss, ferns, all that could convey delicious coolness on this warm April evening; the subtle pervading perfume of hothouse flowers, the distant strains of music—the whole was full of an overpowering magic to Maggie; and the poor child, so inexperienced in grandeur, save such still magnificence as is to be found in picture and sculpture galleries, felt quite lifted out of herself, far above the little natural vanity, with which, scarce an hour before, she had looked at the reflection of her pretty dress. Here in this enchanted palace all she wanted was sight, fully to take in the loveliness about her, and a grasping memory to retain it.

She was somewhat restored to herself by seeing Lord Torchester at the entrance of the grand vestibule. He was in deep conversation with a pale lordly-looking old man, on whose breast flashed a diamond star.

'Our ambassador, my dear!' whispered Mrs Berry in almost awed accents. And even Maggie, in whose nature flunkeyism had as small a part as could well be, felt suddenly the immense distance between herself and the shy young man who appeared to talk with far more ease and self-possession to that grand historical personage than to her simple self. Yet this sight awoke no ambitions in her unworldly—or shall we say, wise, little heart? She smiled to herself at the idea of having gone forth from Uncle Grey's dingy back parlour to encounter, ay! and flirt with, that very inaccessible high mightiness an English earl, and reflected with unmoved serenity on the great gulf fixed between them, and the absurdity of supposing it could ever be spanned. Meantime her party stood grouped together a little within the door, waiting *chacune pour son chacun.*

Mrs Berry glanced about with unrestrained eagerness for her

Count, or at least his sister, or somebody connected with that fascinating individual, but none appeared, neither did any claimant for the hands of the ladies seem forthcoming. So for some little time they were obliged to content themselves by pointing out to each other the various notorieties whom they recognised.

'Look, Mrs Berry! We must move back a little. Here is the Dowager Queen of Spain.'

'Is it, really? Well, she is no great things to look at. But there!—there's the Duchess of St ——. Oh! what a necklace!—and look at her ear-rings!'

'That lady in blue she is talking to is the Princess Mathilde. Well, she's no beauty.'

'Handsome is that handsome does,' growled the Maclaggan.

'How do, Mrs Berry—how do, Miss Grey?' said the welcome voice of Lord Torchester.

'Oh! my lord, what an awful crowd! It is quite pleasant to see a face one knows,' cried Mrs Berry with effusion; 'and none of our set seem to have come yet. Is Mr Trafford here?'

'I am sure I don't know. I haven't seen him all day. I don't think he'll come,' said Lord Torchester, his brows dropping wrathfully at the mention of his cousin's name.

'Dear, dear! I wonder he would like to miss such a sight as this.'

'Oh! he has seen so much he doesn't care for anything. Come, Miss Grey, have you been in the ball-room yet? There's a quadrille next'—looking at his card. 'Will you do me the honour?'

'Yes, with pleasure,' said Maggie, dying to rove about with some one who would go where she liked. The Earl, brightening at her delightful readiness, presented his arm.

'Oh! stay, Lord Torchester! Mrs Berry, where shall I find you? For if we don't settle some rendezvous we shall never meet again in this crowd.'

'Well, I suppose if we don't, Lord Torchester won't eat you, or let you lose yourself,' returned Mrs Berry, with a dreadfully significant giggle. 'However, let us fix the entrance here, just at the top of the grand staircase, and then we can all be free.'

'All right,' said the Earl; and he walked away in triumph with his prize.

'I suppose, Mrs Berry, that is quite a settled thing,' said Miss Salter, nodding in the direction of the pair as they disappeared through the door-way.

'Indeed, my dear, I don't pretend to know. I can only say that

it's my young friend's own fault if she isn't a countess before two months are over. There's no mistaking *his* intentions.'

'Oh! you can never tell what these young fellows are after,' observed the kilted Maclaggan. 'Jones and the Count *do* say he has got shaky about the affair himself, and sent for that high mightiness of a cousin of his to extricate him.'

'How can they tell such horrible stories?' cried Mrs Berry, with heightened colour. 'I'll speak to the Count about it myself. Why, any one can see with half an eye that my lord hates his cousin like poison and wishes him at Jericho; though, to my mind, he is a nice, easy, pleasant, gentleman-like fellow. It's my belief that the Earl's mad jealous of him.'

'Perhaps so—perhaps,' returned the Maclaggan, with provoking scepticism.

'No doubt the Countess had very different views for her son,' said Lady Salter, naturally sympathising with rank; 'and it would be a sad blow to her if he was to marry your charming young friend.'

'Oh! I don't care for blows,' said Mrs Berry impatiently, looking anxiously around. 'Let them settle their own affairs and fight their own battles—come, let us move on, or we'll never see no one, continued the widow, crowding her negatives, as was her custom when excited or agitated.

At this juncture, however, De Courcy Jones and a very much be-whiskered gentleman, buttoned up with surprising tightness in a very short-skirted Polish lancer costume, presented themselves, and carried off the willing widow and the fair-haired Jessie Maclaggan to the ball-room.

Meantime Maggie and her Earl, like two happy children escaping the schoolmaster's eye, found that the next dance was a waltz, the difficulties of which were quite beyond Lord Torchester's powers.

'So sorry, Miss Grey—thought it would be a quadrille. I never could waltz; and there is such a mob, I'd be sure to come to grief.'

'Oh! never mind; it is quite a treat to look on. What a lovely room! How the chandeliers glitter! as if they were hung with diamonds. And the roof!—*do* look at the roof, Lord Torchester!'

'Very fine. I never saw anything better done than this. We could do nothing in London like it.' And then the two children looked on amused for a while in silence; Maggie tapping her little foot in time to the music.

'I am so sorry I can't waltz,' said the Earl, noticing this.

'Never mind, I don't care a bit. I am sure I scarcely thought I had a chance of dancing when I came in.'

'Why, surely you knew *I* was to be here.'

'Yes; but then you must know a great many people—your own sort of people, I mean—and I couldn't reckon on you, you know,' said Maggie, with malice prepense.

'Why, Maggie—I mean Miss Grey—I would rather dance with you than with any one—in fact, it's a bore to dance with any one else.'

'Oh! Lord Torchester, don't talk like that; it's silly. Look! there's Mrs Berry; and what a short coat the gentleman she is dancing with has on!'

'Why, it's "Cocky,"' said Lord Torchester, after looking a moment earnestly at the pair—'"Cocky" in uniform!'

'Who is he?' asked Maggie, laughing.

'You know him—that Polish fellow who plays the piano. What's his name?—Jones and the others call him "Cocky." He always howls about his country when he is half screwed.'

'Oh! M. Kockanowska. I should never have known him. How well he valses!'

'Why, Miss Grey, you wouldn't dance with that beggar?' said the Earl, jealously.

'Why not? He must be a capital partner.'

'Well, I wish you'd promise me you will not. I couldn't bear to see you dancing with the fellow.'

'Oh! you need not distress yourself; he will not ask me.'

'But if he does?'

'I'll say "Yes,"' replied Maggie, mischievously. 'But come away into that beautiful room; we can just see through the door opposite; I want to look at it, and we can hear when the music plays for the quadrille there.'

'You are very provoking, Miss Grey, and I am not going to stand it any longer,' said the young peer, half lovingly, half angrily, 'You can just do what you like with Mrs Berry, so do get her out of the way to-morrow, and see me quite by myself for half an hour.'

'Indeed, indeed, I can *not* do what I like with Mrs Berry,' cried Maggie, eagerly. 'I wish I could—for her own sake,' she added, seeing her companion's broad countenance brighten all over, and thinking of the objectionable Count.

'Well, then, I'll ask her myself,' said the Earl stoutly, and turning very red. 'I am not going to stand it any longer.'

As his lordship particularised no special grievance, Maggie was prudently silent, and they made their way into the saloon which she desired to inspect.

It was not quite so crowded as the others, and seated on a low fauteuil was a lady—a dark-haired lady, with piercing black eyes, and a curved haughty mouth—dressed to perfection, absolutely dressed into beauty, and glittering with jewels. A little court of gentlemen were around her, whose homage she received with that gracious but 'stilly' tranquil grace so distinctive of a high-bred Frenchwoman, and, receiving rather more than his share of quiet notice, Mr Trafford stood among the group—he indeed had the honour of fanning her 'sereneness' with her superb fan. He seemed too absorbed in his occupation to notice the entrance of Maggie and his cousin.

'There isn't much to see here, but there's a nice cool corridor at the end, and we can get round that way into the ball-room again.'

'Very well,' Maggie didn't want to stay there.

'Was that lady the Marquise de Beaumanoir?'

'What lady?'

'The lady Mr Trafford was talking to.'

'Geoff?—was he there? I didn't see him—I fancied he would not come. No! I don't suppose the Madame de Beaumanoir would condescend to come to such a gathering of Bonapartist *canaille* as she would consider this—but I didn't notice her. By the way, how do you like Geoff Trafford?'

'Very much—very much indeed. He is so amusing.'

Yes! he can be pleasant enough, but I have found him a horrid nuisance here. He is a very worldly fellow, and now that he has sown his own wild oats (and I suspect he has been awfully fast) he can make no allowance for other people.'

'I suppose he thinks they cannot be sown quick enough, and I'm sure he's right—wild oats seem very foolish things.'

'There, Miss Grey—that's our quadrille.'

Lord Torchester was rather silent and absorbed after this. He was, in short, revolving in his own mind how best to carry out the resolution to which he had come, that to-morrow should end his discomfort and uncertainties and give him some definite rights over Maggie. For, inexperienced in women and their ways, he concluded that her happy ease of manner and readiness to be with him

were proofs of decided preference, and that his only difficulty would be to surmount a certain pride on her part which might induce her to refuse one so much above her in social rank. This, he did not doubt, he should get over, as he felt that once the ice was broken he had quite a torrent of eloquence in reserve wherewith to talk down all scruples. But the present effect of these reflections was to impart a stubborn uneasy expression to his countenance, and to induce speculations in Maggie's mind as to what could make Lord Torchester look so cross.

'I had better go to Mrs Berry now,' she said, as the quadrille ended; 'I have been a long time away.'

'She does'nt want you a bit, and you know that. She is prancing about somewhere with "Cocky."'

'No matter; she may want me, and I ought to go and look for her.'

'Well, come along then. I think you are very ill-natured.'

They had scarcely reached the door of the ball-room when Trafford joined. 'Forgive me, Miss Grey. Pardon, Torchester, if I am obliged to part you for a few minutes. The Duchess has been inquiring about you and I promised to send you to her; she is at the other end of the room, with only three daughters.'

'Well, I can't go. I have to take Miss Grey back to Mrs Berry.'

'But, my dear boy, she was dining with your mother the day before yesterday, and promised to see you, and write about you, and deliver all sorts of messages. St Lawrence is with her now, and—I think you had better go and do the civil. Miss Grey need not be irreparably lost, and if she will allow me to escort her to her chaperone the exigencies of the case can be met.'

'What brings that old harridan to Paris?' growled Lord Torchester, not liking to leave St Lawrence the unchecked power of representing or misrepresenting his proceedings to one of the greatest gossips in London.

'That I cannot tell—but here she is.'

'Well, where shall I find you?'—to Maggie.

'At the general rendezvous—the top of the grand staircase.'

The Earl, with a sigh and a muttered something that was not a blessing, relinquished Miss Grey's hand, which was immediately transferred to Trafford's arm.

'Come, Miss Grey—are we really to look for Mrs Berry?' said Trafford, looking down at his companion, and deliberately taking in every detail of dress and hair, face and figure.

'Yes,' said Maggie, smiling and colouring a little under this examination.

'So be it. This is a wonderful bit of "Arabian Nights" magnificence, is it not?—such marvellous taste.'

'Oh! I never could have imagined anything so lovely. I have felt quite bewildered with the splendour and the crowd—it is something to remember all one's life. I am glad you are delighted too; Lord Torchester said you would not care for it—that you had exhausted everything, and had no admiration left.'

'Yes I have!' returned Trafford, very shortly. 'So that young scamp has been representing me as a *blasé* old fellow! I think shooting too good for him—don't you, Miss Grey!'

'Indeed I do not! You forget I like him very much; but why is he so cross with you?'

'Oh! he fancies I interfere with him, and object to the card-playing set he has fallen in with. By the way, I was much obliged to you for the hint you gave me the first evening we met—it opened my eyes a little sooner than they would otherwise have been to De Bragance and the rest.'

'I don't think I said much, or anything,' said Maggie, trying back in her memory for what had passed.

'I suppose you are aware eyes speak sometimes?' looking down into hers with, perhaps, more in his own than he was aware of.

'No doubt a way these fine gentlemen give themselves,' thought Maggie, as she naturally turned her own away in search of the frolicsome widow.

'Well, I can find no trace of Mrs Berry,' said Trafford, looking round, 'and it is folly to stay here waiting for her. Have you seen all the wonders of the scene, Miss Grey?'

'I am not sure; I have seen quantities of rooms and'——

'Ah! you have not seen the Court Louis Quatorze? That's the gem of the whole place. Come, I must have the pleasure of showing it to you;' and Maggie found herself carried off after a fashion she would never have permitted to Lord Torchester, but which with his worldly cousin she did not dream of resisting.

Turning from the brilliant vestibule, Trafford led the way to a dimly lighted corridor, which gave something the impression of a cloister from its sudden quiet, and arched roof; from this they turned into one loftier and wider, but still dim, cool, and quiet, though pervaded by the hum of the multitude. Along one side ran a range of lofty sashless windows, each furnished with a

crimson-cushioned seat. 'Now look through here, Miss Grey—there is a fairy scene for you.'

'Oh!' said Maggie, clasping her hands and gazing as directed—a long-drawn 'Oh!' of fullest delight. And the sight that met her eyes justified it. A large square court, enclosed by the richly-decorated pure white façades of the hotel; the tesselated pavement crossed by crimson pathways of carpet, the centre filled with a circular mound of rarest richest flowers of every scent and every hue, and, surmounting all, a fountain flung its feathery jets and musical murmur over leaf and blossom, drawing out the depths of perfume and freshening every tint. At each side were miniature lakes, bordered by rocks, shells, and creeping plants, behind which huge mirrors doubled their size. Through an archway opposite could be seen, in the full light beyond, a picturesque group of *cuirassiers de la garde*, and gorgeous parties of ladies and their cavaliers passed to and fro, or stood to watch the fountain and the flowers.

'It is altogether "the triumph of decorative art," as "our own correspondent" would call it,' said Trafford, after he had allowed Maggie uninterrupted enjoyment for a few minutes. 'Let us sit down here, it is so deliciously cool and comfortable,' he continued, 'and then, when the first lot of people go in to sup or refresh, and the room is less crowded, you will give me a waltz, will you not, Miss Grey? You waltz, of course?'

'Yes, I shall be very happy, and if the room is not quite so crowded it will be delightful; for see, with all my care I have had my poor dress torn;' and she held up the drapery with a long rent in it, which left a perilous loop to catch the unwary and finish the destruction of the garment. 'I suppose needles and thread are not to be had, and I dare not venture into the ball-room with it—stay, this will do,' and she drew the torn edge through her waist-band, the cloudy gauze forming a pretty festoon.

'What a misfortune!' said Trafford, looking attentively at her costume; 'for really you are *mise à ravir*, as our hosts would say. I can fancy you singing "Through the wood! through the wood! follow and find me." There is something positively Arcadian and nymph-like about you.'

'Yes, isn't it pretty?' returned Maggie, laughing and blushing just a very little under his steady gaze. 'Mrs Berry was very kind to give it to me, and it is so much grander than anything I ever had before; I could not help thinking as I dressed, that I must

feel much as Cinderella would have felt when her fairy godmother sent her to the ball.'

'I wish I didn't feel quite so like the prince in the same story, thought Trafford, with a smile at his own folly. 'What a sweet Cinderella it is! That young cub has good taste! He must be choked off though, at any cost. Yet, if she cares for him, it will go hard with me to vex her!'

He kept his thoughts to himself, however, and only *said*, 'Was the feeling agreeable?'

'Yes! No! You see, I knew I had to come back to the cinders of my daily life, and that without a fairy godmother.'

'How do you know the prince may not come for you too, and carry you off to his father's palace in a chariot drawn by peacocks?' Maggie laughed merrily, although she fancied she noticed a little significance in the tone of this speech, and replied, 'No! no! there is no prince for me! I fancy the cinders will be my portion always: but they are not very dreadful if they are never worse than at present.'

And then Maggie turned, leant her arm on the window-sill and her cheek upon her hand, looking into the beautiful court below, while Trafford meditated on the advisability of seizing the present opportunity of ascertaining the young lady's views respecting his cousin, and striking some decisive blow. 'For,' thought the worldly sceptic, 'though she looks "so bewitchingly simple," who can tell what schemes and mischief may lurk under that pretty exterior? I mustn't be idiot enough at this time of day to believe "all's gold that glitters," though there is a very genuine glitter about this metal.'

'I suppose poor Torchester is now giving good words with his lips but cursing me in his heart, as he feels the fangs of the Duchess closing on him. I fancy he is lost to us for the evening.'

'Why did you send him away and make him uncomfortable?' asked Maggie, still looking down into the court.

'For his own good; to say nothing of the Duchess being a sworn ally of his mother's, attending the same church, &c., though the fact of her Grace having daughters has modified her religious views respecting balls; you must know, Lady Torchester is very religious; in fact, *dévote*. Nevertheless, I do not think even a voice from heaven would induce her to give up her son, her only son! She is so wrapt in him.' He paused, but Maggie kept silence, for her heart beat a little chokingly. She quite understood

the lesson Mr Trafford was trying to read her, and though perfectly conscious of the great social gulf fixed between such aristocrats as the Traffords and herself, and not in the least wishful to span it over, she nevertheless, in her woman's heart, felt hurt that a man—a pleasant, sympathetic, chivalrous-looking man, like Geoff Trafford, should think it necessary to warn her off, and she told herself, with sudden and unusual pride, that she was worth being loved, be she ever so poor and insignificant, while the wealth of affection and truth *she* had to bestow lay all fresh and unexpended. Having waited a moment for a reply, Trafford resumed, 'I had a letter from Lady Torchester this morning, and she is very anxious to hear about her boy from this great friend, who, by the way, is related to the young lady she intends Tor to marry.'

'Indeed!' said Maggie, and relapsed into silence.

'I suppose,' continued the operator, 'it is not very pleasant to be married to order; but I hope Torchester will not disappoint his mother, she has set her heart on this match, and it is really very suitable, and all that sort of thing.'

'I hope not,' said Maggie gravely; then, raising her head, she turned to Trafford with a smile stealing round her mouth, though the eyes looked demure, and added, 'and in the mean time you are dreadfully afraid he will marry me; are you not, Mr Trafford?'

At this daring and sudden carrying of the war into the enemy's quarters, Trafford was silenced for an instant, aye, and puzzled too; then recovering himself; 'A perfectly natural wish on his part,' he said, with polite gravity, 'the question is, how such a marriage would affect your happiness?'

'Listen to me,' returned Maggie Grey, colouring vividly, and looking fearlessly straight into Trafford's eyes; 'set your mind at rest; I do not want to marry your cousin. I suppose it is stupid to talk of such things, but I would rather be among the cinders of life all my days than lose the chance of love, real love I mean. And you don't suppose a *woman* could love that shy, awkward, kindly, self-willed boy? Why, a husband ought to be something stronger and better than oneself, something you could be just a little bit afraid of sometimes.'

'Then I am afraid, Miss Grey, you have small chance of finding the desired article,' said Trafford, trying to reassume his former tone of easy pleasantry, while he half closed his eyes to conceal the look of admiration he knew he could not keep out of them at this sudden fire in his companion. 'For there is an amount of daring

in you quite beyond most men, which, no doubt, accounts for your friendship with that red republican pet you keep *au cinquième*.'

'You may laugh, Mr Trafford, but I am serious. I do not want to marry Lord Torchester.'

'Perhaps,' said Trafford, in a more natural tone. 'But you know he wants to marry you?'

'No! I do not. He likes me very much, and that is quite natural,' continued Maggie, apologetically; 'for we are both young, and enjoy the same things, and I never made the fuss about him the rest did, so he felt at home with, and'——

'Loved you! Perfectly natural indeed,' interrupted Trafford, now quite in earnest, and deeply interested.

'Well, that is saying too much. He will very soon forget all about me, and if he *does* think of marrying me,' continued Maggie, smiling and blushing, as she played somewhat nervously with her flowers, 'he will be very pleased by-and-by, when he is older, and understands things better, to think he did not;' and she looked up to Trafford for acquiescence. But he took in her glance without speaking, so she went on, 'You may make your mind quite easy. I don't want to marry Lord Torchester; though,' lighting up again at the idea of being thought unfit for any one, 'if I really cared for him, I would not give him up for you or any one, except his mother; it is an awful thing to vex a good kind mother.'

'You are an extraordinary girl,' said Trafford, half to himself. 'How wonderfully wise common sense sounds when you have not heard any for some time. Nevertheless, Miss Grey,' he continued, with a contradictoriness it would have puzzled him to account for, 'you ought to consider that Torchester would be thought a great catch by some—most—young ladies. He is not a bad fellow, and has a goodly unencumbered rent-roll. Mount Trafford is a charming country-seat; the family mansion in St James's Square only requires a little paint to be a most desirable town residence; the family diamonds would look *almost* as well as the violets and dewy leaves,' with a caressing smile, 'and a countess with common sense and uncommon nature might possibly take the London world by storm, and make herself a great power there.'

'You are very puzzling, and I am afraid sarcastic.'

'No! upon my soul! You ought to think of what you are rejecting, Miss Grey. It is what is generally considered (and justly) a first-rate chance.'

'Mr Trafford,' said Maggie, opening her eyes, 'do you want me to marry your cousin?'

'Most certainly not,' he replied, with an uncompromising sincerity that, in spite of her reason and common sense, wounded his companion. She coloured deeply, and felt the provoking tell-tale tears spring to her eyes; but she held them back resolutely, and looked steadily at her bouquet. Trafford, however, read the transparent countenance as he would a page of clearest type, and felt furious with himself for his unguarded speech, all the sources of which he must not explain. 'What an idiot!' he thought, 'how shall I do away with the impression I have made?' 'Certainly not,' he continued gently, 'for though it is only fair to set forth the worldly advantages of such a marriage, I am sure they would never satisfy *you*, unless'—here he hesitated and lost the thread of his measured discourse, looking at the downcast face before him, and seeing the quick rise and fall of the fluttered bosom; then after a moment's abrupt pause, he exclaimed naturally, 'And, by Jove, the cub is *not* worthy of you!'

'At all events,' said Maggie, still looking down, 'it is a polite way of putting it; but do not abuse Lord Torchester too much, or I shall grow suddenly fond of him, and then——' she paused in her turn, and looked up with a spice of shy coquetry extremely *piquante*.

'Ah! Miss Grey, in spite of your tall talking, I see you have a weakness for raw boys. That stony heart of yours has nevertheless soft corners for Torchester and the cousin he resembles.'

'Yes, it has,' said Maggie, laughing and recovering herself; 'only my cousin John is five or six years older than I am, and has been fighting his own way in the world longer than that; so he will be no raw boy when I see him again.'

'He is a lucky fellow to have such a champion ready to welcome him back,' returned Trafford, gravely. 'When do you expect him?'

'Oh! I don't know. I don't expect him at all; but come, we must look again for Mrs Berry; and once more, Mr Trafford, set your mind at rest. I may marry my own cousin, who is in my own rank of life, but I will not marry *yours*. I am quite as disinclined for an unequal match as the Countess of Torchester or yourself!'

And with a flash of defiance in her grey eyes Maggie rose up.

'Look for Mrs Berry,' repeated Trafford, offering his arm, and wisely letting the last part of her speech pass unnoticed; 'by no means. Where is that waltz you promised me? Be generous, and show your forgiveness of my stupidity and blunders by keeping your promise.'

Trafford looked earnestly into her eyes, and spoke in such an eager real tone that Maggie was surprised and flattered, and said, rather shyly, 'I have nothing to forgive, and I like waltzing.'

So they waltzed, and a very delightful waltz it was. The floor was so even and the music delicious; and, as Trafford's experience had foreseen, so many had gone to refresh that the crowd was considerably diminished, and their style suited each other—and—well, there was something very delightful about that waltz—so much so, that when the music ceased Trafford mentally consigned the musicians to a warmer place than the ball-room; but he only said, 'Those fellows have surely cut it short!' and Maggie said, 'I think they have.' Then Trafford suggested an ice, and when they went to look for one they fell in with Lord Torchester, looking awfully black, and in the clutches of a large distinguished-looking girl with red hair and freckles, and a certain disdainful good-humour in her broad face, who stared hard at Maggie, but gave Trafford a smile and nod.

'Mrs Berry is waiting for you,' said Lord Torchester, as he passed. 'I think she wants to leave;' and he went on.

'Oh! Mr Trafford, never mind about ice or anything; do take me to Mrs Berry,' said Maggie, anxiously; she felt curiously nervous and shaken, and not equal to bear a scolding.

Trafford looked at her. 'You are not afraid of this woman?' he asked.

'Oh, no, no! she is very good to me; still I do not want to put her out.'

'Come, then,' said Trafford, good-humouredly. 'We will soon find her.' And they did—in anything but a happy mood, with no one in attendance but 'the Maclaggan,' kilts and all, looking rather bleary about the eyes.

'Well, I'm sure, Maggie! I thought I was never to see you again! What in the world'—

'I have to apologize, Mrs Berry,' put in Trafford, blandly. 'You see long rustication has extinguished the old habit of slipping through a crowd which I used to possess like other *habitués* of

dazzling scenes; so we have been impounded in the refreshment-room, and have only just escaped.'

'And gracious goodness, Maggie! how you *have* torn your dress!'

'Will you do me the honour of dancing this quadrille?' asked Trafford of the widow, with his best bow and smile.

'The Duchess wants particularly to speak to you,' said Lord Torchester, coming up at that moment, and grinning a malicious grin.

'I wait your decision,' said Trafford to Mrs Berry, not noticing his kinsman.

'I am sure I am very happy,' replied Mrs Berry, brightening a little.

'Then tell the Duchess she must have patience, my dear fellow,' said Trafford, offering his arm to the flattered widow, who, regardless of her duties as *chaperon*, went off triumphant; so Maggie managed to get her ice at last, and ate it very contentedly in Lord Torchester's company; she even found a waltz with De Courcy Jones not disagreeable, though by no means equal to Mr Trafford as a partner, and she enjoyed quite a near view of both Emperor and Empress; but Geoffrey Trafford she saw no more that evening. At last Mrs Berry insisted on going away—there was a long waiting for the carriage; but the united efforts of Lord Torchester, Kockanowska, and 'the Maclaggan,' were finally successful, and at last they were at home.

'Well, it was a grand affair, but scarcely worth all the money and trouble it cost me. Undo this lace, Maggie, will you? I am dead tired!'

'Oh, Mrs Berry! I am sorry you did not enjoy it. *I* never saw anything so splendid and beautiful.'

CHAPTER XIII.

TRAFFORD was rather late at breakfast the morning after the ball. He was partaking of that meal slowly and reflectively, when to him entered Lord Torchester—airily dressed in a light grey summer suit, a blue tie, and a rose in his button-hole.

'What! only at breakfast? Why it is twelve o'clock!'

'One is not compelled to feed the moment one is up.'

'By which you mean me to believe, that you were up with the lark, though you are only refreshing now?'

'Exactly! Of which you can believe as much as you like.'

'Well, I have been about for a considerable time, and I think I could eat something more now. That *pâté de Strasbourg* looks well.' So Lord Torchester sat down. He seemed in extraordinary good spirits, yet restless, even nervous, withal. 'I say Geoff! It's awfully hot, and that ball last night, with the crowd, and the standing about, was enough to knock any fellow up, except a bag of bones and muscle like you. I *must* have a glass of brandy-and-soda to set me right.'

'Bless the boy!' said Trafford, ringing. 'What would Exeter Hall say to such refreshment—instead of prayers and expounding? I always thought brandy-and-soda necessary after a supper rather than a ball, though at your age, probably, the most dangerous intoxication is to be found at the latter.'

'Brandy and soda-water,' said Lord Torchester to the waiter, 'and put a lump of ice in it. I don't know about danger,' he continued, 'if pleasant things don't hurt, where's the danger?'

'If! The pith of the matter lies in that "if,"' returned the Mentor.

'I do not know what you are driving at, Geoff,' said Lord Torchester, taking the goblet of cooling beverage and enjoying a deep draught. 'At least, I have a sort of idea,' nodding to the waiter to go. 'But,' in a resolute, almost bullying voice, 'you just need not trouble yourself about the matter. I have made up my mind.

'To what?' asked Trafford, quietly. 'Try a little more *pâté?*'

'No, thanks. Look here, I am determined to tell you all about it—for you have always been a good fellow till now, and I must say I've been awfully disgusted with you since you came here. You have interfered, and been such a nuisance.'

'Thank you. Well make a clean breast of it if you are so inclined, and I'll try and get back into my good fellow condition.'

'Do; for I feel as if I must speak to some one, or I'll burst,' said the Earl, throwing open his coat.

'Make haste and speak then, for God's sake!'

'Geoff, I'm going to propose to her to-day,'—and the speaker blushed to the roots of his hair.

'I thought so—"her," meaning Mrs Berry's pretty young friend?'

'Yes, of course! Didn't she look awfully pretty last night?'

'She did. I do not object to your taste, but'——

'There is no use in "buts." As Mrs Berry said, "What's the use of being noble and wealthy, young, and my own master, if I can't marry whom I like?"

'Mrs Berry said so, did she? I suppose she never heard that *noblesse oblige?*'

'It shall not oblige me,' said the Earl, stoutly.

'And you are quite sure of being accepted, I presume?'

'Well, I don't mind telling you that I rather think I am. I fancy from some remarks of——however, that don't matter; but she is always better pleased to be with me than any one else—evidently better pleased; and I have no doubt, Master Geoff, though you thought yourself very clever last night getting rid of me as you did—that Maggie was wishing you at Jericho all the time.'

'Oh, you think so?'

'I am sure of it. And I must say I don't think it was at all fair the way you tried to come in between us; for though you are getting rather an old fellow, still——I don't consider you quite a safe man.'

'You are complimentary! Now, Torchester, I don't want to be more of a nuisance than I can help. As you say, you are your own master; and after all my talk you can do as you like. But don't you think you are throwing away liberty very soon? Don't you think it will be a little unpleasant to begin life in London with the character of a dupe? Hear me,' said Trafford, as Lord Torchester sprang up, indignantly, '*I* do not say you are a dupe, but the world will. Don't you think it will be rather trying to receive Mrs Berry as your wife's bosom friend, and to hear her reminiscences of "the time when the dear countess was my companion?"'

'She's a fearful female, certainly,' said the Earl; 'but'——

'Another word, and I am done. Don't you think it will be a little trying to hear the future Viscount Trafford and the Ladies Margaret and Adelina and Augusta, &c., calling the excellent chemist in Beverly Street, "uncle"? And finally, Torchester, do you think it quite worth while to break your mother's heart, such a mother as yours, for the sake of a girl—nice and good as she may be—whom you have scarcely known four months?'

'But it won't break her heart. Why should it?' said the young

Earl uneasily. 'I am sure Miss Grey would make her a kinder, better daughter than Lady Mary Wandesforde, or Miss Beauchamp, or Margaret Wallscourt. Why my mother would dote on her, once we were safely married and the thing could not be undone. And as to the old uncle—I think it very snobbish of you, Geoff, first to find out all about her people and then talk of them in this way. I —but, by Jove! it only wants twenty minutes to one. Here *garçon! garçon!* a *fiacre*, quick! I said I'd be there at one; so good-bye old fellow—I'll tell you the news to-night,' and burning all over with anticipation, slightly dashed with nervousness, Lord Torchester hurried away to meet his fate.

Geoffrey Trafford leaned back in his chair, and thought, while his *Galignani* hung neglected from his hand.

After all, there was some truth in what Torchester had said: once the marriage was an accomplished fact, the Countess would, probably, reconcile herself to it; and as to himself, he wished to heaven he had not taken that unnecessary Quixotic journey to Paris. What good had it done? If this headstrong cub was saved, it would be through the unworldliness of his *innamorata*, not through his (Geoffrey's) exertions or influence; he might as well have talked to a stone; unless indeed his conversations with Miss Grey strengthened her resolution to reject her lordly lover. But, query, after all, would she refuse him? Girls were easily influenced by the people with whom they lived, and of course Mrs Berry was eager for the marriage. Then what a future it opened up to the homeless little waif! Yes, it would be strange after all if she *did* refuse. Perhaps she was even now giving a blushing consent—which would of course be sealed by a kiss, and an uncommonly sweet kiss those lips of hers would give! Young, shy muff, though he was, Torchester would never, surely, be satisfied with less than a dozen.

And altogether, the ideas suggested by Trafford's reverie were so humiliating and unpleasant that he rang sharply, and in his turn ordered 'Claret and soda-water—iced, remember!' in a sterner voice than the waiter had heard from him since he was in the house. Then, after some further moody reverie, Trafford sallied forth.

It was a bright glorious day. The Tuileries gardens were crowded with fantastically-dressed children and their *bonnes*, and thickly studded with artistically-dressed and posed ladies—seated on their *chaises à deux sous*, their feet on another—journal, novel, or crochet, in hand; some of them picturesquely accompanied by a

petit amour or two; mother, children, and nurse, all dressed to perfection for their separate *rôles*. I suppose there are shabby people to be found in the Tuileries gardens, but I have never seen them, and am inclined to think that when they do go there that intense sense of the fitness of things which characterises the Parisian induces them to slink up the out-of-sight paths.

Trafford strolled slowly along, intending to hunt up an old bookshop in the Quartier Latin, where he hoped to find a copy of a certain rare 'History of the Ducs de Bourgogne;' for mixed with his love for sport and pleasure was a strong under-current of intellectual taste, which, as the first fire and animalism of youth burnt out, flowed with a fuller tide and more urgent need of supply. How is it that the animalism of youth is free from the repulsiveness which clings to the materialism of middle age? I suppose we accept the first as the necessary initiative stage which will lead to higher and purer things, or there is a naturalness about it that carries its own justification; but the lower tone which, after knowing better things, is deliberately adopted by the experienced man of the world, this it is that defiles the soul.

Geoffrey Trafford strolled along, brightened by the influence of the light and colour round him, and thought how unmistakable were the characteristics of race—from the children's games to the soldiers' uniforms, from the sit of the men's hats to the shape of the women's hands, from the mode of cooking to the mode of thinking—which underlies all. How radically un-Teutonic was all about him! Yes, Paris was a very delightful place for a fortnight, or a month at most; but after that, there was nothing to keep a man there if he had outlived the days when a love affair was a matter of importance ('And that,' thought Trafford, 'is a moveable date'), unless, indeed, there was a revolution—he would grant that would be exciting; but having been in the gay city in December, '51, he had had enough of that sort of excitement. Now he would leave; his visit had been altogether a *fiasco*. Bolton was right; it was time he began to make a place for himself. Though no partisan in politics he had some convictions; and at any rate his long-neglected profession offered him occupation, interest, perhaps fortune; and perhaps mingling in the busy actual life of London would bring convictions and earnestness and the salt of energy to brace him. Yes, he would go to-morrow—no, to-morrow would be Wednesday, and it would only be polite to look in at Mrs Berry's reception and bid adieu to the fair widow and her 'rabble rout.

'Besides, I should like to see how the little Countess elect bears herself.' At this point of his meditations Trafford stopped under the shade of a great chestnut tree, and Maggie's earnest, innocent eyes seemed again to look into his as they did the night before, when she said: 'I may marry my own cousin, Mr Trafford, but I will not marry yours.' 'They are not fine eyes, but sweet. By Jove! this woman has fine eyes!' as a tall lady in black silk and a cloud of black Brussels lace, with one damask rose in her black lace bonnet, came up to him. She held a small gold-edged book in one hand; the other rested on the arm of a substantial, dignified-looking *dame de compagnie;* and she walked with queenly, haughty grace. As she approached, a smile of recognition curved her thin, firm lip, and Trafford, bowing as though to an empress, raised his hat.

'My good genius has guided me here this morning. To what fortunate accident do I owe the pleasure of seeing Madame la Marquise?'

'I am *en pénitence*, Monsieur, and go to the *chapelle expiatoire*.'

'I presume it is not permitted for a heretic and a son of perfidious Albion to accompany you?'

'I fear not; you might be a disturbing element. But dine with us at six (M. de Beaumanoir will be charmed to see you), and after come with me to hear Cruvelli in "Robert le Diable."'

'Madame, I gratefully accept.'

Madame de Beaumanoir gave him a flashing look out of her great black eyes and passed on.

Trafford, too, roused from his dreaminess, walked away and soon found himself in the region of the old book-stalls, where he succeeded in discovering one of his former allies, an old snuffy, mummified bookworm, with whom he enjoyed a long and interesting conversation.

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On inquiring for Lord Torchester while dressing to dine with Madame de Beaumanoir, Trafford found he had not returned since morning, from which his Mentor argued that, having been probably accepted, he had stayed to dine *en famille* with Mrs Berry and the fair *fiancée*. 'Any way, the matter is out of my hands, so I may put it out of my head and amuse myself a little; for altogether Torchester has been a stumbling-block to me.' But somehow the matter would not go out of his head, and he felt positively relieved to find himself at the Hôtel de Pontigny, and obliged to turn his thoughts to totally different subjects.

Madame de Beaumanoir entertained Trafford, an elderly vicomte with a red ribbon, and *M. le mari*, in the *salle à manger* which formed one of her own suite of apartments; and a most dainty apartment it was: the walls a pale grey, richly but lightly decorated in the Pompeian style; the hangings of soft amber, fringed and relieved with borders of red-brown velvet.

The dinner was perfection. The poetically-arranged dessert, with its delicate service of engraved glass and silver, the profusion of flowers, the noiseless attendance which seemed to anticipate every want, the easy elegance, the quiet simplicity, made one forget, by the absence of effort, the immense cost at which this completeness was attained.

Then the *demi-toilette* of Madame—rich, dull, thick silk, of the most delicate spring-like green, with quantities of priceless white lace, and emeralds sparkling at ears and throat—a sort of half-subdued sparkle in her great eyes, and a rich colour in her clear brunette cheek.

'Can the force of civilisation further go?' thought Trafford, as he unfolded his napkin and prepared to enjoy his *potage à la printanier*. 'Would Bolton enjoy this? No; it is too poetical for him.'

M. le mari was a quiet old gentleman admirably suited to be the husband of Madame. His tastes led him to harmless and inexpensive pursuits, with which his wife never interfered—nay, so far furthered, that on his fête day she always presented him with the newest invention in microscopes, or cases, or specimens, or whatever else might gratify the tastes of a naturalist; and let him wander about as much as he liked with a bag-net at the end of a stick, catching butterflies and spiders to his heart's content.

M. le Vicomte was an especial friend of the Marquis—an advanced student of nature, the mention of whose name would send a thrill through every museum in Europe and make the British megatherium rattle its bones in approbation; and Trafford could not help admiring the quiet tact with which the suave hostess suggested topics that might please and occupy these gentlemen, while an occasional glance at Trafford, after a fashion he well remembered, revealed the supreme contempt with which she regarded them.

'And who will escort me to the opera?' asked Madame de Beaumanoir as the servants withdrew after placing coffee and the

chasse on the table. 'M. le Vicomte, M. Trafford, and you, *cher ami*—I can give all places in my *loge*. I have long intended to hear Cruvelli in "Robert," and this is her second appearance.'

'Madame will excuse me,' said the Vicomte; 'I have promised to meet the curator of the Berlin Museum.'

'And I,' interrupted the Marquis eagerly, 'accompany Monsieur; we had so arranged it. Nevertheless, Monsieur Trafford will, no doubt, give thee his arm, *chère amie*, and so thou shalt not be alone.'

'I am quite at Madame's orders,' said Trafford.

'Then let us go,' replied Madame, glancing at the *pendule*, 'and enjoy it *en connoisseurs* from beginning to end.'

So the Marchioness rose, rang for her maid, and went in search of her cachemire.

'What a life!' said Madame de Beaumanoir as they rolled towards the 'Italiens' in her exquisitely-appointed brougham. 'Imagine a grasshopper or a beetle for the aim of one's existence—the discovery of a new variety of moth or a lizard with additional legs being the fulness of one's ambition! What sympathy could a woman like myself extract from creatures such as these?'

'The moths, or *M. le mari?*' asked Trafford, with mischief. Madame de Beaumanoir looked at him reproachfully and kept silence. 'Forgive me, Madame,' he resumed, smiling; 'but when I see the glorious light of your eyes all undimmed, the soft tint of cheek and lip as fresh as ever, I cannot believe that the want of that sympathy which Monsieur bestows on the spiders and the flies can be so essential to your happiness and well-being.'

'*Fi donc!*' returned the Marquise; 'you little dream the emptiness of my life.'

Trafford answered by a tender and inquiring glance, while he thought to himself, 'She is just the same as ever—wonderfully little changed.'

The overture was finished when they reached the theatre. Madame de Beaumanoir, whose box was next the stage, seated herself *en évidence*, facing the house, and swept it with her glass, naming, as she did so, most of the celebrities she recognised—ticking them off, as it were, with little epigrammatic sentences far from flattering to their subjects; then she listened to a few bars of the music she had been so anxious to hear.

'Where is that cousin whose salvation you so impressively confided to me a week—ten days ago?' she asked suddenly. '*Mon Dieu!* what a boy he is!—the most English Englishman I ever

met. What will he be? But why has he never returned? He paid me one visit, and it appeared such an agony to make his entrance that apparently he had no courage to retire himself, so he stayed an eternity. I suppose his sufferings were so great that he could never encounter them again.'

'Ah! Madame,' replied Trafford, laughing, 'I blush to have so troubled you, but I was in extremity; and now all is over, I fear.'

'What! is the young gentleman lost? Has he absolutely married the blonde mees whom his mother feared so much?'

'No. I don't think he can quite have managed that, but I fancy he is as totally lost.'

'*Bon Dieu!*' cried the Marquise, with a flash in her black eyes, 'if a son of mine did so'—

'I should not like to be the *belle-fille*,' said Trafford, bowing.

'Truly, there should be *lettres de cachet* even now for such imbeciles. And think how grateful a young man would be on coming forth after six months' incarceration, safe, sound, free, and in his right mind.'

'With the world before him where to choose those fragments of love and sympathy which concealment and illegality render so piquant. Is it not so, dear lady?'

'Trafford,' murmured Madame de Beaumanoir, with a long upward look at her companion as he stood opposite her, leaning against the side of the box, 'how changed you are! How hard and cold!'

'*Au contraire*,' returned Trafford, laughing, 'it is you, Madame, who have assumed the hard-hearted *rôle*, and would separate true lovers. I also would separate them, but deplore the grief I cause.'

'Your system is so different,' said Madame de Beaumanoir, thoughtfully; 'you try to reconcile such impossible things.'

'How so?' asked Trafford.

'You will have freedom of choice, disinterested affection, prudence, regard for station, regard for social considerations; and when in the face of these incompatibilities a marriage is concluded, the unhappy pair are to exist solely for each other, and, the poor wife especially, to have no *divertissement* whatever. Ah, Monsieur! I have been a good deal in your country and know your life, and though an English lover'—here Madame smiled, looked down, and then flashed up again in a very bewitching sort of way—'an English lover may be very amiable, very—as for an English husband —*Dieu m'en garde!*'

'Well, but many of our wives manage to emancipate themselves, replied Trafford, after a pause and look properly suggestive of admiration.

'Ah!' cried la Marquise, drawing herself up with an air of proud disdain, 'but at what a cost of self-respect! Nothing can atone for losing the distinguished esteem of the social circle amid which one lives; but it is here exactly that the great selfishness of English nature makes so much misery and confusion.'

'Pray continue; I am all attention.'

'Marriage is a most excellent institution—indispensable in short; but as you contrive it in England it is the sufferings of individuals that secures the well-being of the mass. "The family" is essential in our present stage of civilisation, and an Englishman, not satisfied with securing this, demands the life-long thraldom of the female head, and is generally exacting and disagreeable in proportion as he honestly submits himself to the bondage he inflicts. As to us, who can say that the family tie is not profoundly felt and acknowledged in France? And where can truer wives be found? Yes, Monsieur, in face of your insular prejudices, I repeat it. Where can wives be found with deeper, truer regard for the interests of their husbands and families—more ready to sacrifice themselves on the shrine of duty? But the common-sense of our nation tells us that marriage and maternity are grave things, entailing so many degrading minutiæ and sombre occupations that the higher life requires some extra aliment, some more ornamental affection, the blossoms, as it were, on the rugged boughs of existence, which can hardly flourish in the almost unavoidably vulgar intimacy of married life; and thus we allow to both husband and wife the solace of exterior friendship—an ideal affection to enliven the dull routine of everyday life, generally most innocent and unexacting in character and—but I pause; it is a subject on which I have thought much, while to you it may be simply uninteresting.'

'It is charming to hear your exposition of anything, Madame, and to me your views are striking and original; nevertheless, being English, though not so insular as many, I should like my wife, if I ever possess such a treasure, to bestow both her real and ideal affection upon me; and, though at the risk of your thinking me a brute, I must confess that if I were constantly receiving confidences from and supplying sympathy to a beautiful woman, or even a pretty one, I fear a time would come when I should consider Platonic affection very meagre diet indeed.'

There was small disapprobation in the melting glance which Trafford encountered! and he himself was surprised to feel how little it stirred him, for he was half unconscious of the talisman his memory held, in the vision impressed on it by a pair of soft grey eyes, so true, so earnest, that it seemed as though falsehood and sophistry must strip themselves and stand confessed in their light.

'And I did *not* think you so English, *mon ami*,' said Madame de Beaumanoir, looking down on the splendid fan with which she was playing; 'but you must admit the injustice of English husbands; they will not give their wives straw to make brick, neither will they let them seek it amid the stubble of their neighbours' field.'

Trafford's reply was prevented by the entrance of an *attaché* of the Russian Embassy, a beautiful young barbarian, with an elaborately civilised exterior, who seemed not too well pleased to find a distinguished-looking Englishman installed in the place of honour and confidence.

Madame de Beaumanoir was exquisitely courteous and complaisant. Nevertheless 'Monsieur le Prince' did not stay long, and went forth from the presence of la Marquise, gnawing his underlip with a venomous look in his light green eyes.

'I am glad you gave that young fellow his *congé*,' said Trafford, with a mischievous smile; 'there are some things which remain in the memory; and I cannot forget how nearly six years ago I was sent adrift for (if I remember right) a compatriot of this gentleman, and how bloodthirsty I felt, almost, towards your fair self.'

'Ah! *fi donc*, Trafford,' said Madame de Beaumanoir, with a smile and a sigh, 'you were so impulsive in those days. You went away without giving me an opportunity of explanation; and I never saw you again till you startled me by your sudden reappearance the other day. Ah! you have given me but little idea what your life has been through this long absence.'

'Dare I hope it would interest you?'

'Come and try. I can stop you when I am weary.'

Other privileged visitors interrupted the conversation, so Trafford accompanied Madame de Beaumanoir back to sup in her boudoir, and detail his adventures. It was late before he reached his hotel.

He threw his gloves and handkerchief on the table, and with them a withered rose—a large creamy yellow rose, with velvety petals and dark green polished leaves—which had lain (the crown-

ing elegance of her toilet) where the lace of Madame de Beaumanoir's corsage crossed low on her bosom.

'Lord Torchester has asked for you several times, Sir,' said Trafford's valet, 'and begged to be told whenever you came in.'

'Well, it's late now,' said Geoffrey, looking at his watch. 'Two o'clock, by Jove! and I'm tired and sleepy'——

'Here is my lord.'

'Send away your fellow,' said the Earl, coming up to his cousin. The young man looked pale; his hair was disordered; he still wore the light grey suit in which he started so fresh and hopeful in the morning; but, without being able to define in what it consisted, Trafford felt there was a great change in the Earl.

'Sit down, Tor,' said Geoffrey, kindly, seeing the lad hesitated. 'You wanted to speak to me?'

'Any commands for England?' he returned, trying hard to put a good face on it. 'I start in the morning.'

'Oh, indeed!' judiciously avoiding any questions or expression of surprise. 'Well, I dare say you've had enough of it—and so have I. If I hadn't promised Madame de Beaumanoir to go to a soirée at some historical personage's hotel to-morrow I think I would go with you.'

'I wish you would. Oh, Geoff!' after a short pause, and breaking down. 'It's all over—she won't have me! And by Jove! didn't she talk, and advise me! I felt ready to cut my throat, Geoff. I am certain that brute of a cousin of hers is at the bottom of it. I wish to heaven he'd break his neck! There isn't another girl like her in the world. It's too bad, isn't it? And yet she seemed so sorry for me. Well, I came away half mad, and went I scarcely know where, when I stumbled on that fellow De Bragance. He asked me to dine with him and was monstrous civil. I was glad to go anywhere with any one. The champagne was very cool and refreshing—I think I drank a good deal of it. Then we had cards, and I had a regular run of luck at first; but after—by Jove, I did lose! Never lost so heavily at a sitting before.'

'How much?' asked Trafford, with great interest.

'Two thousand. So I got up and left them, feeling giddy and queer. But as I walked here I cleared and seemed to grow cool—as if I had been plunged in cold water, and after being stunned a bit felt braced up again. I fear I have been rather making a fool of myself, so I'll get away to England—see the mother—run down

to Mount Trafford. Will you join me there, old fellow? We might go on to Scotland or somewhere. After all, Geoff, you are right. *Noblesse oblige.*

'Well, you have had a squeeze; but you'll be none the worse of it. Two thousand is a serious pull; but if it cures you of gaming the money is not ill-spent. My aunt will be overjoyed to see you!'

'Yes; but the worst of it is she'll think me such a blockhead. You know I wrote her an idiotic letter asking her consent—making quite sure of Maggie—Miss Grey.'

'Oh, your mother will never mention the subject; she will understand it is all up by your returning.'

'I say, Geoff, would you mind writing her a line, just to say it is all over? You needn't go into too many particulars. It will prevent questions and bother.'

'I will, if you wish; but you must leave the *modus operandi* to me.'

'Oh, certainly; and now I'll be off to bed, for I am dead beat.'

'The wound is but skin deep after all,' thought Trafford, looking after him as he left the room. 'Denial and loss of money appear to have wrought a miraculous cure. Now had Mademoiselle said "Yes," I dare say Tor would have been true as steel, and quite content with his lot—nor would it have been a bad one. By heaven! life is an awful puzzle—and a muddle to boot! I am highly pleased this young fellow's affair has ended as it has; but I wonder how the real balance stands. In spite of Madame la Marquise and her logic I fancy there's pure metal enough in that brown-haired little witch to stand the common uses of life and the disenchanting minutiæ of matrimony without requiring ideal affection or exterior sympathy. Poor young thing! perhaps she has made an ideal of this cousin of hers and may have bitter disappointment yet. High or low, that pretty gentle Maggie ought to marry a gentleman.'

Having arrived at this profound conclusion Trafford went to bed.

The day but one after these occurrences Lady Torchester received the following letter:

'MY DEAR AUNT.

'Before this reaches you, you will have embraced your prodigal and I have to congratulate you on the happy termination of your fears and anxieties. Torchester returns to you free and sane, none

the worse for this little episode. which, on the whole, has not been to his discredit.

'His chief error has been unworldliness and a boyish disregard of that station in life to which it has pleased God to call him; but he has done nothing unworthy of a gentleman.

'Now you must not suppose that I have been the smallest use in the matter. Neither you nor I nor any one else could have prevented Torchester laying himself and his belongings at the feet of his divinity, and it is solely to the honest pride and womanly instinct of Miss Grey that we owe his deliverance. This girl is no adventuress, my dear aunt, but a sound-hearted little Briton, quite willing to keep to her own class and work her own way. Still I think a hint I dropped respecting the close tie existing between yourself and your son and the wish you entertained as to his future, may have helped (if anything was required) to confirm her in her rejection of a splendid offer, for she seems to have a peculiar regard for a mother's right to love and obedience. In short, I should like to interest you in Miss Grey, for I imagine she is rather friendless, and is certainly at present with a very objectionable party—the widow described by Torchester; who, though herself merely vulgar and foolish, will inevitably become the prey of a card-sharping French count; and what Tor's "divinity" will do then I have no notion. However, for us "all's well that ends well," and I earnestly hope your future may be untroubled with fears for your son's well-being.

'I dare say I shall see you next week, for though there is much to amuse I find Paris the less fascinating the older I grow.

'Can I do anything for you here? I have really quite a pretty taste for lace and *rococo* objects of all kinds, and the temptations of this pleasant city are more in number than the hairs of one's head.

'Always, dear Lady Torchester,
'Your devoted nephew,
'GEOFFREY TRAFFORD.

To this, in due course, Trafford received a rapturous reply.

The beloved boy had returned and was all a mother's heart could wish. The unpleasant topic was never named between them. Geoff himself was the best and most judicious of kinsmen; and as to Miss Grey—that sweet girl had a friend for life in Lady Torchester, who would send for her at once, only for obvious reasons

this would be imprudent. But if Geoff would see her, and with his usual tact explain that she might command Lady Torchester, he would largely add to the obligations under which he had laid his affectionate aunt.

'Hum!' said Trafford to himself, as he lighted a cheroot, 'this is a difficult delicate task her ladyship has allotted me. I wish she would write herself. Yet I'd like Miss Grey to know she has a substantial friend in case of emergencies; but how the saucy monkey will take it is another matter.' So he sat and smoked and meditated for the space of half an hour.

CHAPTER XIV.

As the appalling facts gradually dawned on Mrs Berry, first that Maggie had absolutely refused the Earl, and secondly that he had left Paris, her grief and anger were deep and loud. Yet not to that unendurable extent which they might otherwise have attained had her own affairs not preoccupied her considerably.

'Well,' she exclaimed, on the evening of the fatal day, 'I must say there never was any one worse treated than that poor young gentleman—nobleman, I mean. After all the encouragement you gave him!—wearing his gloves and taking his bouquets, and letting him hand you the kettle, to say nothing of your losing yourself for good two hours with him at that tiresome ball. Eh? what do you say? It was with Mr Trafford? Well more shame for you to be such a fool! Couldn't you see with half an eye that all *he* wanted was to keep Lord Torchester away from you? You don't think he'd have taken that trouble? Much you know about it!—contradicting a person of my experience, to say nothing of your ingratitude to me. After all you have cost me!—swindling me out of that beautiful dress—for it was nothing *but* swindling! Do you think I'd have bought it for you if I did not think you were to be Countess of Torchester? Oh! it's all very well to cry. Much good that will do! Yes! you have made me a nice return. And there's Lady Salter and Selina, and Miss Maclaggan—won't they be asking questions, and so surprised that Lord Torchester is gone?

"And what's happened to take him off? Was he obliged to take his seat and the oaths?" I'm sure it's enough to make any one swear. "When will he come back?" and all that! Oh! *I* know them! Do you think they'd believe me if I said you'd refused him? No! not if I went on my bended knees. Oh! you are a bad, cruel girl, Maggie.'

'And you are too bad,' cried Maggie, wearied out with fatigue and excitement, but badgered into a little spirit again. 'You know I never thought Lord Torchester would absolutely propose for me; and I always told you to put such things out of your head. And now you are vexed because I wouldn't make myself miserable, and let that good, true-hearted young man make a fool of himself. As to my dress—that shall cost you nothing: I have two pounds in my money-box. I'll give you the rest next month, and as you are so disgusted with me I can go away and not trouble you any more—though I shall never forget all your kindness—but I don't want to be a burden.' And poor Maggie, fairly broken down, burst into a hearty good cry.

'Don't be such a ridiculous goose, Maggie,' returned the widow, not unmoved. 'You needn't leave me if you don't like to; at any rate not till I'm married; but you are enough to vex a saint, and I'm annoyed enough besides about other things. There, dry your eyes and make me a cup of coffee, for Rosalie is out. And now I shouldn't be a bit surprised if the Earl came back—but if you refuse him a second time!—well, ducking in a pond would be too good for you!'

But Lord Torchester did not come back. Mrs Berry, after a few days, seemed to forget him, and indeed Maggie saw so little of her that there was small opportunity for conversation.

The fair widow seemed altogether absorbed by Madame von Garn. They went bargain-hunting in the mornings, drove in the Bois together in the afternoons—Mrs Berry providing the carriages—and went to soirées and theatres, the *entrée* to both supplied by the Baroness; so Maggie was left in peace. Left rather too much, she confessed to herself. Though far from regretting her refusal of Lord Torchester, she was surprised to find how much she missed him—to feel how his notice had lifted her out of her former insignificance, and how, when the sunshine of his favour was withdrawn, she was quietly but instantly let down again into her original lowliness. Though Maggie was woman enough to smile at the cause, she was sufficiently human to dislike the effect. On the

whole, these were glorious days for Monsieur Du Val. The widow had given up her music lessons for some time; but the kind little artist, grateful for Maggie's many good offices, and doubtless attracted by the tender grace of her pleasant youth, had begged to continue Mademoiselle's for his own gratification. So Maggie enlivened his little den *au cinquième* three times a week on her own account, and as often to read on Monsieur's. What, however, disturbed her most, was the total disappearance of Mr Trafford. 'I wonder did Lord Torchester tell him I said "No"' she thought, over and over again. 'I am sure he thinks I could never refuse such an offer, and that the Earl, warned by him, retreated of his own accord. I should like him to know the truth; but *I* could never tell.' Perhaps Mr Trafford had returned to England with his cousin? But no, he had called and left a card since that young nobleman's departure. And Maggie was most provokingly out on that particular occasion, though of late almost a prisoner for want of a companion.

Then he did not appear on either of the two Wednesday evenings succeeding the ball—the ball which seemed to Maggie to have been the culmination of her career; and these evenings were unusually flat, as every one tired at the first, and Monsieur de Bragance was absent from the second—gone, his sister said, to London, on affairs of the most vital interest—vital perhaps to nationalities; but enough, it was not for her to speak.

Ten days had elapsed from the day of the memorable ball, and Maggie was greatly disgusted with herself, she felt so low, so deserted, so unreasonably desponding; and with a brave resolution to shake off the disagreeable incubus, she proposed to Monsieur Du Val to accompany him part of the way to Passy, where he went once a week to give lessons in a *pension bourgeoise*. Monsieur gladly consented; some slight scruples offered themselves as to Mademoiselle returning alone, but these were quickly dispersed by Maggie's reminder, 'There is so much permitted to English girls.' So they started very happily, and our little heroine rapidly felt the benefit of the air and sun and movement; the wholesomeness of out-door life. She enjoyed the curious mixture of philosophy and sentiment, shrewdness and childishness, which characterised her companion's talk, indeed he had to remind her twice of the distance she had to return alone, before she would accept his warning.

Meantime, the days which succeeded Lord Torchester's departure

had in them a new element for Geoffrey Trafford, which, though he felt it keenly, he could neither account for nor define. He half wished to return to England, but something held him still in Paris. He professed to be charmed with Madame de Beaumanoir, who did her very best to turn his head, and who was handsome, *spirituelle*, and young enough to fascinate any man, nevertheless she could work no spell on him, of which she was quite aware. Consequently '*ce cher Traffore*' assumed enormous proportions in her estimation, and she brought heaps of invitations and engagements to the captivating Englishman; who, half bored, half amused, accepted them he scarce knew why. Perhaps they helped to cover his reluctance to leave Paris from himself.

One bright morning he strolled away up the Quai d'Orsay, vaguely dreaming, and trying to rouse himself into activity, in consequence of a curt but impressive letter from Bolton, from which Trafford could gather that his incomparable tact was supposed to have saved the Earl, but that the family solicitor's soul was bowed down with disappointment at his persistent waste of time.

'However,' said Trafford, apologetically to himself, 'I really must try and deliver Lady Torchester's message to Miss Grey before I leave, and to do that I must find her alone—so here goes. I did not think I had strolled so far.'

He proceeded leisurely across the Pont des Invalides, smiling scornfully at himself for the mixture of eagerness and reluctance with which he sought the interview. He would not acknowledge, even in thought, that there could be a shadow of danger to him, experienced and wordly-wise as he was, and not over-weak towards women, as he rather conceitedly told himself; so he indulged unrestrainedly in the reminiscences of the ball. It would have greatly surprised any of his dear good-fellow friends, could they have peeped through the outer husk, as curious naturalists do through glass hives, and seen the working of his thoughts. The wonderful fidelity with which the scene at the Hôtel de Ville was recalled, and all the looks and tones and variations of Mrs Berry's insignificant little companion (who after all was merely 'a young person' in the eyes of such right-minded people as Lady and Miss Salter), brought back and listened to, over again. It was by no means the first time they had so presented themselves, but they had never been so dominant as in this quiet early stroll. So deep was he in thought or reverie that he did not notice a lady and gentleman who, coming from the direction of Passy, met him at the

corner of the Rue Jean Goujon—the gentleman a haggard, light-eyed man, with long wild brown hair, a brown velvet coat, and an indescribable felt hat, such as none save an artist far gone in Bohemianism could wear even in Paris, where stranger head-gear can be worn than in London. He was talking and gesticulating eagerly to his companion, a slight young lady in a pretty fresh muslin morning dress, a little straw bonnet with white ribbons and bluettes, a black lace veil tied loosely over it, and a black silk scarf; she looked uneasily around, as if seeking for escape, but brightened visibly as they came up with the solitary Englishman, who was more startled than he would have liked to own, to hear his own name pronounced by the very pleasant voice, the tones of which he was just then recalling.

'Mr Trafford! How strange to meet you here!'

There was unmistakable pleasure in Mr Trafford's deep eyes as he replied quietly and suitably; but there was also irrepressible inquiry in the glance he gave her companion.

'And how come you here, so far from Mrs Berry's, then?' he asked.

'I escorted my Red Republican music-master part of the way to Passy, and returning met Monsieur.'

She spoke in French, with a slight wave of the hand towards her companion, the dreaded Grenier. Both gentlemen raised their hats, and the Frenchman poured forth a voluble eulogium on the noble and rational English system which gave young ladies liberty, freedom of choice, &c.

'He doesn't understand a word of English,' said Maggie, confidentially, in a low tone; 'and if it would not be very inconvenient *would* you mind walking back with me? It is very stupid I dare say, but I *am* so afraid of him.'

'Certainly, Miss Grey; I wanted to see you.'

'Wanted to see me?' in a tone of the greatest surprise. 'Very well.'

So the trio proceeded down the Allée d'Antin; the artist's brow becoming more and more overcast. He spoke politically; of aristocrats contemptuously, of kings murderously, of standing armies viciously. Still Trafford was calmly polite, and almost amused at the increasing fear and uneasiness in Maggie's face. At last, on reaching the Champs Elysées, where a tolerable strong current of passers-by was setting towards the Barrière de l'Etoile, he offered her his arm, which she immediately and gladly took. This very

strong step, as it would seem to a Frenchman, appeared to silence and annihilate M. Grenier, who suddenly raised his hat and bid them 'Good day.'

'Had I known the effect, I should have offered you my arm long before,' said Trafford, laughing. 'Poor M. Grenier! He certainly is a very objectionable cavalier. I should avoid him as much as possible, if I were you.'

'Avoid him! Yes, of course,' cried Maggie; 'but who could have dreamed of meeting him away in the Allée Marbœuf? And it is so many days since I went out that I felt quite *triste* and ill, sitting all alone in the house; so I begged M. Du Val to let me walk part of the way to Passy with him.'

'And how is it you have been so much alone?' asked Trafford, looking down into his companion's eyes, with a kindly elder brotherly look that passed right into her heart without fluttering or disturbing it in any way.

'I hardly know—accident. Mrs Berry has been much engaged, and—well, I think I am a little out of favour.'

'I suspect you have been a naughty, disobedient girl, eh? I have always known you are a rebel to the heart's core.'

'Only against unreasonable things,' said Maggie, gaily, feeling suddenly and unaccountably joyous and brave—hopeful of the future, charmed with the present. 'But will you not come in? she added, quite naturally, as they reached the widow's residence.

'If you will permit me,' returned Trafford, following her upstairs to Mrs Berry's apartments. That lady was out, but expected to return shortly; so Trafford subsided comfortably into an easy-chair, in the cool shady *salon*, fragrant with the flowers which Maggie's care always supplied. While that young lady, relieved to escape the heat and glare without, took off her bonnet and scarf, and took up a large paper fan which lay on a table. The slight flush which the morning's warmth had lent her cheek deepening the tint of her eyes, while a sweet, bright expression played round her lips.

Trafford looked at her steadily for a moment, and then, half maliciously, exclaimed, 'Poor Torchester!'

Whereupon Maggie's cheek and brow, and even the morsel of snowy throat seen above the collar of her dress, blushed crimson. 'You need not pity him,' she replied gaily; 'I dare say he is coming to his senses by this time, and is much obliged to me for help-

ing him to recover them; for all that, I am very fond of Lord Torchester, so do not let us talk of him any more.'

'But,' returned Trafford, shifting his position to another easy-chair within a more confidential distance of his companion, 'I came to talk to you about him, or, at any rate, the "*affaire* Torchester," as the French would say, and you must not smother me at once. I was on my way here when I met you and your favoured adorer just now.'

'Don't talk in that tone, Mr Trafford,' entreated Maggie, with sudden gravity. 'You do not know the horror I have of that man, the disgust I have even for myself, to think that I am obliged to come in contact with him, the difficulty'—— She stopped abruptly.

'You are surely not obliged to see much of him? The brute is not presumptuous?' asked Trafford, with a sudden knitting of the brow and darkening of the eye, very different from the expression with which he had looked at her a moment before.

'No, no! I manage very well; but, you know, Mrs Berry is no great help; any one of the Count's set is a *rara avis* in her eyes. She is quite stupid about it; but there, I must not bore you with my small woes and affairs, especially as you can do me no good.'

Trafford made no immediate reply; he was thinking how he could best execute the Countess's delicate mission. At last he exclaimed, 'Can you not quit this Mrs Berry?'

'There are several excellent reasons why I should not,' returned Maggie, smiling. 'First of all, I do not see very clearly where else to go to; and—but you are really very good to trouble about me—I suppose I shall drift into some resting-place some time or other,' and Maggie rose and began to rearrange some moss roses and heliotrope in a china basket, as though she wanted to put an end to the topic.

'I had a letter from Torchester's mother a few days ago,' began Trafford, abruptly floundering into his subject from sheer inability to lead up to it. 'She made many very flattering remarks about you—and'——

'About me?' cried Maggie, in utter astonishment.

'Yes. You see, I thought it right to let her know the true version of the affair; indeed I promised Tor I would that night when you sent him away in despair. So I wrote her a despatch, descriptive of your refusal of the heir of all the Traffords, &c., and she is much struck by your disinterestedness and high principle, and all the rest of it. Now don't be angry, Miss Grey; I feel as

if I were deucedly impertinent, talking in this strain to you, but the upshot is, Lady Torchester would be delighted to be of use to you in any way, and begs you will command her.'

Maggie's colour deepened again, and then she laughed. 'What a dreadful "rock ahead" I must have been,' she said, 'that Lady Torchester's gratitude for her son's escape should take so distinct a form! She is very good; but I don't exactly see how I can go to her ladyship and say, "Take care of me, because I have refused your son." I am afraid, Mr Trafford, the care-taking will remain, as it has always done, on my own shoulders; and,' she added, with a pretty sauciness exceedingly piquante, 'they are not unequal to the task.'

'Well,' returned Trafford, with a caressing smile, 'you have, on the whole, answered with more amiability than might have been expected from so strong a republican. Nevertheless, according to Lady Torchester's notions and my own, I confess that you have acted with an unworldliness that is certainly not usual, and as certainly deserving of—well, let us say respect.'

'Pray say no more about it, Mr Trafford; it seems to me the most natural thing in the world not to marry a man you don't love.'

'Do you think love, then, the greatest good in life?'

'Yes, I believe I do,' said Maggie, slowly and thoughtfully; 'at all events, I should be sorry to renounce all chance of giving and receiving it; but,' changing her tone, 'I suppose you think me an utter simpleton?'

'I cannot make up my mind which you are, wise or foolish.'

'Not at your age?' cried Maggie, in honest surprise; by no means thinking, or intending to say, that Trafford was old, only that he had seen and known enough to decide on such an eminently youthful subject.

'A man cannot decide every question, social and political, at thirty-three or fifty-three, or even a hundred and three,' returned Trafford, laughing, yet just the least bit nettled at the idea that he might be entitled by age to decide the question with the disinterestedness of a looker-on.

'I should have thought,' Maggie was beginning, when Mrs Berry entered, not in her grandest toilet, and very dusty, after a hard morning's shopping with Mrs Maclaggan.

She was, on the whole, rather comforted to find Trafford in quiet conversation with the sinning Maggie; 'for,' she argued

hastily, by the light which her special intelligence shed on things in general, 'if there wasn't a chance of the Earl coming back it's little he'd trouble after Maggie or me. He's not off guard yet!'

'Well, I'm sure, Mr Trafford,' she said aloud, 'the sight of you is good for sore eyes! Where have you been since the ball? Somehow that seemed a regular break up. The Count's gone, and Mr De Courcy Jones, and my lord—and I declare I *do* miss him; a nicer young gentleman—nobleman, I mean—never lived.'

'Torchester is very fortunate in pleasing you, Mrs Berry. His mother has been very unwell, and was anxious to see him; indeed, he ought to have gone to her before.'

'All right,' thought Mrs Berry. 'He has no idea his cousin was refused; I hope that little goose won't blab?'

'I shall not let this fearful female know how much *I* know,' thought Trafford. 'If she still has hopes of Tor she may take better care of her *protégée*.'

'Dear me,' said the widow, aloud, 'that's a sad trouble. I hope her ladyship isn't bad, and that we may soon have his lordship back again.'

'I have no doubt he will return to Paris on the very first opportunity,' said Trafford, mendaciously. 'The Marquise de Beaumanoir is meditating a fête, and insists on Torchester assisting; in short, there are endless attractions here.'

Maggie, who was partly behind Mrs Berry, caught his glance as he spoke and shook her head reprovingly, even while an irrepressible smile sparkled over 'eye, lip, and cheek.'

'Well, I am sure it's a delightful place,' said Mrs Berry, cheering up under the influence of her vaguely awakened hopes; 'but it gets rather warm. I'm going down with the Baron and Baroness von Garn, and Lady and Miss Salter, and a very nice young Englishman, a relation of theirs, Mr Spencer Smith—quite a fashionable young man—perhaps you know him, Mr Trafford?' Mr Trafford did not think he did. 'Well, we are all going down to Fontainebleau for a week. The Baron is going to make an arrangement at a very first-rate hotel for us all, and I dare say we shall be very jolly. I am sorry I can't take Maggie; but you see it's the Baroness's party, and she did not ask her.'

'And, indeed, I should much rather stay here,' cried Maggie.

'Well, that's all right,' returned Mrs Berry, a little annoyed at her tone; 'and,' intending to be at once playful and deep by holding on to the Trafford connection, 'I'll thank you, Mr Trafford, to

look in now and again and see that she hasn't run away with that old music-master of hers; for I don't know any one else she likes.'

Trafford, perfectly aware that such a charge was a complete outrage of the *bienséances*, determined to accept it. Visits to a girl so utterly unknown as poor Maggie could not possibly be any detriment to her, while they might be of use in her loneliness, should that brute of an artist turn up. Nevertheless he looked at Maggie to see what she thought, and fancied he read approbation in her eyes, so he very soberly replied that it would give him great pleasure to be of the slightest use to Mrs Berry. Did his commission include written reports to Mrs Berry? or simply an abstract of occurrences on her return? Was he empowered to arrest Miss Grey should suspicions arise of any understanding with M. Du Val, and imprison her in her own apartment?

Mrs Berry laughed loudly, and declared Trafford a funny man; then growing quite cordial, proposed a little claret-and-water or brandy-and-water. 'Now don't say no, if you'd like some.'

But Trafford steadily declined, and soon took his leave.

'Now, mark my words, Maggie,' cried Mrs Berry. 'We'll have Lord Torchester back again; and I *would* be pleased, if it were only to silence that nasty ill-natured Selina Salter. I'm sure I don't want to have her of our party to Fontainebleau, but the Baron has taken such a fancy to young Spencer Smith, who is as rich as a Jew and quite a man of fashion, and somehow mixed up with the Salters, that it can't be helped. I don't quite know what to make of that Trafford, but he *is* a pleasant fellow. I wonder would he like to join us at Fontainebleau?'

'You might ask him,' said Maggie, demurely.

'Now, Maggie,' continued the widow, not heeding her, 'I want you to look over my muslin and barége dresses, my lace scarfs, and summer things, for I want to be very nice, and we start on Tuesday next. I rather fancy the Count will join us, if those horrid politics don't interfere. Isn't it odd how men always take up with something tiresome and dry? Why, they even like dry wine! Come, Maggie, we'll go and turn over all my things, and settle what you will alter while I am away. Now, wouldn't it be glorious if I found the Earl here, and you engaged to him when I came back? If he does ask you again, and you don't say "Yes," why a lunatic asylum would be the fittest place for you.'

* * * * *

Mrs Berry had been gone two days, and Maggie more than once

caught herself speculating if Mr Trafford would really trouble himself to call upon her as he had undertaken. She told herself over and over again that he had only spoken in jest; that it was not to be supposed a clever, travelled, learned, fine gentleman like him, would care to come and talk to an ignorant, insignificant girl such as she was; he was quite different from poor Lord Torchester. Yet Maggie's true stout heart suffered no abasement from this humility. She was different from him, destined by nature to a lower social position, and to this she was cheerfully submissive. He need not talk to her or notice her at all if he did not like; but if he *did*, she was not be moved or overwhelmed by his superiority, nor would she lose a hair's-breadth of her individuality, lowly though it was.

It would probably have puzzled Maggie to put all this into words, but such was the real source of her conduct and manner; perhaps the secret of her great charm, even to a fastidious man like Trafford. Her unvarying good taste was founded on a total absence of selfishness, and on the clear common-sense, which, but for a dangerous sensitive warmth of heart, might have secured her from most of the ills to which human souls are liable.

Nor were her speculations occupied with Trafford only. She had been delighted to find Monsieur De Bragance had left Paris; it seemed to her like breaking off his *liaison* with Mrs Berry; and in spite of that lady's provoking and annoying ways, Maggie was fond enough of and grateful enough to her to wish earnestly for her escape from that fascinating gentleman. As to her own future, she never felt so indisposed to think about it. Come what might, she was better off than when Mrs Berry disentangled her from the Beverly Street chaos, and she should be able to make her own way now, she hoped; towards which end she worked diligently at her music, taking advantage of Mrs Berry's absence and Monsieur Du Val's eagerness to instruct her.

She had enjoyed an unusually long lesson one warm afternoon, and listened to many complaints from her querulous little master, until he suddenly remembered that he had an engagement and was almost late for it. Maggie therefore left him, and descended leisurely to Mrs Berry's apartments.

'*Quelqu'un vous attend,*' said Rosalie, as she opened the door. Maggie felt who it was; and, as she expected, found Geoffrey Trafford in the saloon, comfortably established in an easy-chair, reading an old number of the 'Revue des Deux Mondes,' which he had found upon the table.

'Well, Miss Grey,' said he rising, courteously. 'It is time I should fulfil my promise to Mrs Berry, and come to see what you are about, for I find you under suspicious circumstances already. However, I exercise a kindly consideration. Madame Rosalie (isn't that her name?) informed me you were "*Là-haut, avec ce vieux Du Val*," and instead of allowing her to recall you I have sat here patiently for upwards of half an hour.'

'You are indeed very good,' replied Maggie, laying down a roll of music. 'But you should have let Rosalie come for me. I have not been playing for some time, only listening to poor Monsieur Du Val talking, and he is very cross to-day.'

'And Mrs Berry has been away—how long?'

'Three days.'

'Three whole days! Have you been all alone all this time? No visit from your dishevelled friend?'

'Oh, no. I do not think he knows Mrs Berry has gone, and then Rosalie would not let him in. She says he is a *vaurien*.'

'She was quite gracious to *me*, just now.'

'Oh! *you* are an English monsieur, "*très comme il faut*." Rosalie thinks highly of Lord Torchester and you.'

For which opinion Rosalie had solid reasons of which Maggie was not aware.

'So you are not very sorry to be left behind?'

'Not at all. Yet I should like to see Fontainebleau; but not with the Baron and Baroness or the Salters.'

'And what do you do with yourself all day?—do you never go out?'

'No; I am half afraid. And, you see, I have no lady friends; for I do not like the people Mrs Berry does, and I don't think they like me. However, I must go out to-morrow, for I have some shopping to do and a message for the Maclaggan.'

'"The" Maclaggan! Was that the ferociously red-faced man in "the garb of old Gaul" I saw you talking to at the ball—*the* ball *par excellence*, for it was very delightful'——

'Yes, indeed,' cried Maggie heartily, 'I shall never see the like again,' and she half sighed.

'You don't know what destiny has in store for you, Miss Grey.'

'Nothing very splendid, I imagine.'

'Pray who reads this?' holding up the Revue. 'Does Mrs Berry?'

'No; M. Du Val sometimes lends me an old number. There are

some very learned things which I don't read in it; but the articles on Art are charming; it is like acquiring a new sense to read them.'

And then their pleasant talk flowed on towards Italy and the East, and many another topic, to all of which the most severely proper judge might have listened without a frown. Yet there was a wonderful charm in it all. To Trafford the pleasure of a listener so freshly intelligent, so naïvely sensible; to Maggie the sense of companionship so far beyond her brightest day-dreams; all miserable conventional distinctions forgotten in the delightful tranquil intercourse; nothing to wound and nothing to agitate; yet a subtle delicious consciousness of being appreciated and liked, toning mind and heart and expression to a melodious pitch seldom reached and never long maintained.

At last Trafford glanced at the clock, then consulted his watch, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

'I have paid you an unconscionable visit, Miss Grey, and must depart. Now what will you do with yourself all the long evening?'

'I shall neither be idle nor weary; and if I could only feel sure that Rosalie would not go out I should be quite content; but I'm silly enough to be just a little frightened at being left all alone.'

'You must not be left alone,' said Trafford, taking the hand she held out, and holding it gently while he spoke. 'I will try my influence with Rosalie. I do not like to think of your being alone, and conjuring up all sorts of terrors, as I dare say you would when night closed in; that old woman shall not leave you. By the way, I have a quantity of English magazines and reviews; I'll send some over to you to-morrow, if you would care to see them.'

'I should indeed. I am sure you are very good, and I shall be quite grateful if you would speak to Rosalie. She is kind enough, but so fond of going out.'

Soyez tranquil, she shall not to-night. Will that content you?' continued Trafford, feeling desperately inclined to resume his seat and mount guard till Rosalie's peregrinations were over; but it would not do, so, with a bow and an '*Au revoir*, then, Miss Grey,' he left the room.

Maggie did not know what magic he had exercised over Rosalie, but that excellent female entered a few minutes after his departure, in a very genial mood. '*Tiens donc, ma petite demoiselle*, you have eaten a mere nothing to-day. Let me bring you a cup of

café au lait and an *œuf à la coque.* You may rest tranquil; as you are good enough to value the protection of your old Rosalie, she will not quit you. It is a *beau garçon* of an Englishman, a good heart; none of your brigands of artists, with evil tongues and empty pockets.' And Maggie did rest very tranquilly, and worked till late to make up for the delightful hour or two she had stolen from her duties to Mrs Berry.

I don't think Trafford felt quite so quiet and comfortable. At all events he had more exciting occupation, for, after dressing and snatching a hasty dinner at Meurice's, he looked in at the Opera, and from thence escorted Madame de Beaumanoir to a *soirée* at the hôtel of a Legitimist countess, and finally accompanied the Marquise to her own abode. There they had a very perfect little *tête-à-tête* supper, whereat Trafford was at once *distrait*, audacious, and altogether charming; at least, Madame de Beaumanoir had seldom felt any influence so strongly before. But the long exciting day was over at last; and when Trafford's *fiacre* deposited him at the gate of his hotel he felt too feverish to sleep, and lighting a cigar, he strolled along the Champs Elysées, paused for some time at the corner of a street half way down, then, with a muttered exclamation about 'idiotic folly,' threw away the end of his cigar, and walked briskly back.

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The next morning brought Maggie a goodly package of books: the 'Westminster Review,' 'Fraser,' 'Blackwood,' and several monthly numbers of 'Household Words,'—not as yet merged in 'All the Year Round,'—quite a treasure trove; and with them a little note, for an answer to which '*le valet de ce brave Monsieur Traffore* was waiting.' It was very short, and merely said:

'I hope you will find some help to shorten the hours of your imprisonment in what I send. Pray let me know if Rosalie deserted her post or not, last night. Yours very truly,

'G. TRAFFORD.'

Maggie felt quite excited at the receipt of such a wealth of literature, and a little fluttered at having to reply to so very accomplished a personage; this feeling, however, she shook off, and hastily wrote:

'Your delightful books will turn my imprisonment into recrea-

tion. Rosalie kept to her post so faithfully and pleasantly that I begin to think you a beneficent fairy godfather. With many thanks,

'Yours truly,
'MAGGIE GREY.'

And then she set speedily about her shopping, the message to the Maclaggan, and her needle-work, to earn a long free evening for reading; the unusual demand for a note on her own account suggested a letter to her uncle's wife, from whom she had not heard for a long time. It was not long or full of detail, yet it took some time to indite; she wished not to send a cold barren letter, yet she must avoid anything like boasting. Moreover, a strong feeling of uncertainty induced her to suggest that although Mrs Berry was very kind, it was not improbable she might marry, in which case Maggie would certainly be sent adrift. 'However,' she concluded, 'I think I should be quite able to earn my own bread now, for I have learned much since I saw you.' And so, having sat up much later than the drowsy Rosalie, Maggie went to bed, unusually and unreasonably happy.

It would be hard indeed if we did not sometimes feel unreasonably happy as well as unreasonably miserable. Why is the one condition generally considered a delusion, and the other a presentiment? Is it that pleasure is so rich a boon that we grudge each other even a momentary possession of it? or that miserly memory holds only the fulfilment of the presentiment, and lets the realisation of the illusion slip?

However, no such questions disturbed Maggie, who slept soundly, and woke from a dream of *the* ball to a glorious sunshiny morning and an unspoken conviction that Trafford would pay her a visit in the course of the day.

And so he did—and three or four more, in the course of the next ten days.

Probably, Maggie ought to have known instinctively, that it was a breach of the proprieties to receive a man—young, agreeable, and of higher rank than herself—in *tête-à-tête* visits. But, in truth, *les convenances* were little studied in Maggie's world; every one there thought only of what was pleasant or profitable; from a real impropriety no one would have shrunk more quickly than our heroine, but of lady-like pruderies she knew nothing. As to Trafford, *his* eyes were tolerably wide open to most of the aspects of

things; nevertheless, as he told himself, Maggie's extreme obscurity was her shield, and having promised Mrs Berry to look after her pretty *protégée*, who ought never to have been left alone with that old Frenchwoman, he could not neglect the self-imposed duty. And well Trafford knew he was throwing dust into his mind's eye—that while he was persuading himself that he only waited Mrs Berry's return to bid adieu to Paris, he dared not avow, even in thought, how ardently he wished that return might be delayed. And so, priding himself on keeping his visits to an average of one every second day, he floated on in a sort of temporary elysium, so tranquil, so innocent in its enjoyment, that it was impossible to think that pain or grief could arise from its indulgence.

In these long discursive conversations Trafford learned much, all, of Maggie's simple life. Her happy childhood with her fondly-loved mother—the sweet early youth, so soon clouded over—the dark days of her removal to Beverly Street, the kindliness and simplicity of Uncle Grey, the hated tyranny of her aunt, the short interval of dear Cousin John's championship—all were placed vividly before the polished favourite of London society, who listened absorbed. For all was told so naturally, so truthfully, with such an utter unconsciousness of effect, that a photograph of another life, another world, seemed unrolled before him. Maggie, when speaking of her mother, and describing the wonderful sense of safety and repose when returned to her after the day's study, was quite regardless of the large tears that slowly gathered in her eyes, welled over, hung on a moment to her long lashes, and then splashed suddenly on her work, causing her to look up with sudden surprise and apology to her auditor, whose great tact and strong self-control enabled him so to listen, to question, and to reply as never once to startle the 'tassel gentle' that discoursed such excellent music to his ears.

'She is safe enough; she is so calm, so unembarrassed, and these hours are worth the risk of a few future heart-aches,' thought Trafford, as each visit grew longer than the last, and Maggie's constant occupation in needlework of some kind gave him frequent opportunities of learning her face, with its every change of expression, every turn and attitude of the lithe softly-rounded figure, off by heart, unnoticed by her.

And Maggie, little thinking of the influence working a mighty though unrecognised change within her, began to be anxious for Mrs Berry's return. The widow had never once written since she

left, and she was so heedless of everything save her own pleasure, that it was quite possible she might go on to Germany, or Switzerland, with small consideration for Maggie's position. Moreover, the amount of money originally left was very homœopathic, and Maggie feared being reduced to a still lower ebb. Under these circumstances it was rather a relief to receive an invitation to spend the next evening with Mrs Maclaggan—she might know something of Mrs Berry. It was one of Trafford's non-visiting days, and Maggie felt so sure of his coming the next that she felt almost inclined to write and put him off, as Mrs Maclaggan named seven o'clock for tea, and Trafford seldom took his leave till after that hour, when he generally went to dine with some acquaintance, if not with Madame de Beaumanoir, whose good graces he continued sedulously to cultivate. But on reflection, Maggie shrank from treating his visits as an established fact, and left the morrow to chance.

It had been a warm, almost a sultry day; but towards sundown the clouds broke in a sudden heavy shower, and a soft breeze sprang up, inexpressibly refreshing. Maggie prepared for her walk to Mrs Maclaggan's—not a little disappointed at the non-appearance of Trafford, who for the first time had dropped out of his routine.

'Well, Rosalie, you have been very good, staying in so much for me. You might go out this evening, as I shall be away; but, dear good Rosalie, pray do not stay beyond ten. I shall be miserable if I find you still away when I return.'

'Ah! Mademoiselle, I will take the key with me; then I'll be sure to come back, for I know you cannot get in without me.'

'Do, Rosalie, if it insures your return.'

On reaching the Rue de la Madeleine great was Maggie's dismay to find a note with the *concierge*, informing her that Mrs Maclaggan was very sorry, but they had been presented with a box at the Français for that evening. Such an unusual piece of luck they really could not forego, and must beg Miss Grey to excuse them, and give them the pleasure of her company to-morrow night, instead.

Poor Maggie hastened back as quickly as she could, hoping to arrive before Rosalie's departure. As she approached the corner of the Rue M—— she perceived Trafford coming towards her.

'Miss Grey! I am quite relieved to meet you; for I have just heard with dismay that Mademoiselle and Rosalie "*sont toutes*

sorties." I really began to think that you had escaped my espionage after all.'

'Then Rosalie is gone? How annoying!' And in a few words Maggie told her difficulties. 'You see she has the key, and I really do not know what to do.'

Trafford hesitated for an instant, and then a light as of a great anticipated delight came into his eyes.

'It is really a predicament,' he said laughing. 'I was prevented from calling by the unexpected appearance of some Indian friends *en route* from Marseilles to London. Suppose, as it is a charming evening, we drive out to the Bois, take a stroll under the trees, and return when you think Rosalie and the key will be available? You will trust yourself with me, will you not, as you were good enough to say you considered me a sort of godfather.'

'I am not quite sure about it,' said Maggie, hesitating reluctantly; 'but it would be delightful! And I really do not know where to go.'

'It is our only course,' said Trafford, with the most trenchant decision; and beckoning to a *fiacre* he had already hailed, Maggie found herself *en route* before she had quite made up her mind to 'yes' or 'no.'

The drive to the Bois was very refreshing; but Maggie felt half frightened at the arrangement. There was something alarming in her complete freedom—in the extraordinary companionship that had sprung up between Trafford and herself; and though this sudden and surprising, not to say delightful, proposition of his, did not seem absolutely wrong, it nevertheless roused her to some consciousness of the wonderful preference which he showed for her society; as to hesitating to 'trust herself with him,' a shadow of doubt never crossed her mind, and the result of her hasty tangled reflection was some such conclusion as this; 'Well, right or wrong, I shall never have a chance of anything so pleasant again, so I shall enjoy myself as much as I can;' and Trafford, who much more rapidly and strongly came to the same conclusion, looked into her eyes with a pleasant smile, and seeing that her slight embarrassment was clearing away, said gaily:

'I believe Rosalie is a very judicious person; but for her rapid action, I fear I should have been so stupid as not to think of a little expedition which you really must require after your imprisonment. When does Mrs Berry return?'

'I have not an idea—she has never once written since she left

I only hope she has not gone on to Switzerland or anywhere without letting me know.'

'By Jove! that would be a predicament! You don't think she will?'

'Well, no. I don't think she has clothes enough.'

'Suppose she did, what would you do?' asked Trafford, much more alive to the uncertainties of Maggie's position than she was herself.

'I hardly know. I should manage to get back to Uncle Grey somehow.'

Nothing but the strongest conviction that he must *not* drift into any entanglement, either for his own or his companion's sake, kept Trafford silent; but an idea, suggested by words so descriptive of her forlornness, presented itself of taking charge of her utterly—away from all conventionality and interference—of long summer evenings of tranquil tender companionship—of seeing those sweet truthful eyes filled with the restfulness of sympathy, security, and affection. A lightning glimpse of such a possible heaven shivered through him with so wild an intensity that he was startled and warned by this revelation of his own feelings, and resolved to hold the reins of his self-control with a firm hand, so he only said, 'Back to that amiable aunt of yours, of whom you gave me such a graphic description! Well, I must say it would have been better to have accepted poor Torchester!'

'No! no!' replied Maggie, laughing and shaking her head. 'I can escape from my aunt, but not from a husband.'

'Do you know I had a letter from Tor to-day, and after a lot about Mount Trafford and Scotland, and wanting me to join him there, he inquires in a postscript if you are still in Paris and if I ever see you; a very significant fact, when a man reserves *the* magic name for a postscript.'

'Is it?' said Maggie. 'I wish I might send my kind regards to him, for I do like him; but I suppose it would not do.'

'Certainly not, unless you wish him back within twenty-four hours after receiving your message.'

'Indeed I do not?—ungrateful though it is to say so, for I owe all my pleasant days in Paris to him—and to you,' with a shy glance at her companion. 'The last time—indeed the only time—I went out to drive was with Lord Torchester.'

'Then I hope you don't find this a disagreeable way of waiting for Rosalie and the key?'

'Disagreeable! It is delightful!'

'Even although minus Torchester?'

'Perhaps *you* would like him to be here?' said Maggie, with some dexterity, but only thinking of Trafford's earnest desire to frustrate his cousin's marriage with herself.

'God forbid!' returned Trafford piously; and Maggie laughed so gaily and frankly that Trafford felt for the moment as if the sweet healthy breath of her laughter dispersed the sultry passion cloud lowering over his senses. 'Come, Miss Grey,' said he, 'you have been disappointed of your tea or coffee, and must want some. There is a capital *café* or *restaurant* somewhere about here, I know; let us go and have tea, or ice, or something.'

'Oh, no! not for me,' cried Maggie, a little appalled at such a project. 'I don't want anything.'

'Well, I am mundane enough to want some dinner, and,' looking at his watch, 'it is now a quarter to eight. When can you venture back?'

'Not before ten,' I am afraid,' replied Maggie apologetically.

Trafford smiled. 'Considering her erratic habits we must give Rosalie half an hour's law. I wish to heaven you had said eleven,' and without further hesitation Trafford leant over the front of the little carriage and gave some directions to the driver, who had brought them to the Bois by a quiet side road instead of the principal approach. 'We have quite time enough to refresh, and take a stroll under the trees to the lake,' said Trafford, resuming his seat, 'before ten—and then half an hour more will see us at the Rue M——.'

Maggie, feeling that the guidance of the next two hours had quite passed out of her hands, smiled assent, and they speedily alighted at the *Café de Madrid*. It was a pleasant repast. For Trafford, anxious to keep his fair guest as tranquil as possible, exerted himself to the utmost to amuse her, and nothing could be more perfect and less disturbing than his gay kindly gallantry.

The idea of ice and wafers, or *café* and *petit pain*, at that hour was absurd. No, Miss Grey must share his cold fowl and *mayonnaise* of lobster, and the Johannisberg, which he declared to be his favourite wine. And Maggie thoroughly enjoyed it all. The room they occupied was sweet and pretty with flowers, and the windows opened on a balcony overhanging the fresh green foliage of the Bois. It was quiet, too, after the din of Paris, and altogether the hour they spent there was very happy. The unspoken conscious-

ness both felt that there was small chance of enjoying a repetition of it lent a peculiar charm to every circumstance. Never in the most brilliant society did Trafford feel the same magic which now seemed to inspire him. Could he have talked half so well at Madame de Beaumanoir's—where, in truth, he was at that moment due—his reputation as a conversationalist would have been made.

'Well, Miss Grey, as you positively decline another bottle of Johannisberg, let us start on our stroll to the Lake,' and so they sallied forth under the trees, beginning to be dim and dewy with the closing night.

Leisurely, and often silently, they walked along. Trafford at times rousing himself to speak of distant scenes, that he might, in some measure, break the spell of the present. At length they reached the Lake, where the last of the sunset glow was reflected. It was very sweet and still, and Maggie involuntarily stretched out her arms towards it, and exclaimed in a low tone, 'How delicious! What a sense of rest there is here!'

'Yes! delicious,' murmured Trafford half to himself, and standing a little behind her as she advanced to the water's edge. He was quite silent for some time while his companion wandered a little further from him, intent on examining the place so far as the fading light would permit.

'Ought we not to go back now?' asked Maggie, when he joined her.

'Yes, I suppose so, if you insist on returning by half-past ten.'

'Of course I must. But stay; let me look round once more. It is curious I feel as if I should never see this place again—as if some change was coming—some grief or pain.'

'Do you?' said Trafford, looking into her eyes with a strange expression in his own which she could not make out. 'You are tired and nervous; let me give you my arm, for it grows dark. And without waiting a reply, he drew her arm through his, and they regained the *café* rather silently.

Their drive back was less exhilarating than their going forth; nevertheless Trafford exerted himself to talk in a most praiseworthy manner, considering the tumult of his thoughts. As they approached the Rue M—— he stopped the carriage and dismissed it. 'I shall not go with you to the door,' he said, 'for it is not necessary to inform the excellent Rosalie of all your proceedings, but I shall stay in the Champs Elysées till I see a light in the *salon*, for I shall then know you are safe.'

'Good night, then, and thank you very much for all your kindness,' said Maggie greatly moved by his consideration for her, and also by the sudden enlightenment which his delicate warning respecting Rosalie conveyed as to the serious sort of escapade she had just committed.

'Good night! good night!' repeated Trafford, looking intently into her eyes and holding her hand, forgetful that he did so, till the sudden glow of colour in her cheek recalled him, and he released her.

CHAPTER XV.

THE succeeding day was the strangest Maggie Grey had ever passed. Do what she would—occupy herself how she might, and she strove diligently by every species of employment to divert her thoughts—she could not forget Trafford's haunting gaze; it came between her book, her music, even in her attempt to assist Rosalie in some necessary cleaning and dusting, which that valuable personage performed in very sketchy style. It was always there. She was greatly and painfully disturbed. What could it all mean? It was impossible that a man like Trafford could have fallen in love with her. Yet how else could she interpret the language of his eyes? Incredible as it may seem, a suspicion of such a state of things never crossed her mind before. He was so evidently and candidly anxious to wean his cousin from her, so perfectly conscious of the great distance between them, that she never dreamed of such a possibility. And now that pleasant easy intercourse which she had so much enjoyed was at an end, right or wrong in her conjectures, she felt she could never be at home with him again. And how much she lost! She never for a second deluded herself into supposing there could be any gain to her in such a condition of things. Yet she did hope Mr Trafford would not go quite away without saying good-bye to her; for that he would trifle with her, or with his own feelings, or do any one thing unworthy a true-hearted English gentleman, never entered into her calculation of

possibilities. Yet she almost wished she had not accompanied him on that delightful excursion. Almost, but not altogether; it was too much philosophy to desire the non-existence of so delicious a reminiscence. Yet she hated the shadow of a concealment, and the slight warning bestowed by Trafford was magnified by her sensitive nature into an importance far beyond its real value. How earnestly she hoped he would not call; she felt it would be impossible to meet him alone. The charm, the frank unembarrassed companionship, of their intercourse was gone, and instead, confusion, pain, and certain separation.

In the midst of these distressing thoughts, came a note from the object with some English newspapers.

'Just send me a line to say if Rosalie is at her post, and if all's well. I am writing to Torchester, but shall *not* send him your message. Any news of Mrs Berry?'

This was a relief. He was not coming; nor yet was she neglected; besides, there was a return to the original tone of their intercourse in these few lines. It was no small effort to reply; but she managed after some false starts to write 'Many thanks—all *is* well—Rosalie at her post—and no news of Mrs Berry.'

As evening closed in, and there really was nothing to do but to sit down and read, Rosalie suggested some refreshment.

'Mademoiselle has really had *un jour maigre*, and for what? It could do *her* no good—could not be reckoned in any way—and she had been busy—*Bon Dieu!*—busier than even Mademoiselle had ever been before.'

So Maggie thought a cup of tea would be refreshing and proceeded to make it herself. She was half through the second, and trying hard to read and understand a leading article in the *Times*, when a loud ring was heard. On the door being opened a general confusion of voices became audible—Mrs Berry's sounding over all, something of a journey, and to-morrow, an invitation to come in, and a refusal, in the Count's voice. And then, with a rustling of silks and a running commentary to Rosalie, Mrs Berry entered, in brilliant spirits and high good humour.

Maggie was truly and unaffectedly glad to see her, and Mrs Berry felt the sincerity of her welcome.

'Well, child, I believe you do like me after all; but what a ghost you look! I never saw you look so bad. And so Lord Torchester has *not* come back after all? Never mind! What have you got there—tea? Do get me a cup; and, Rosalie, run to the restaurant

and fetch me a little *plat* or some *galantine*. I'm as hungry as a hawk! Well, Maggie, we *have* had a good time, I can tell you; I never had such a delightful outing in all my life. The Count—he joined us after a few days—quite a new creature to what he was before we left, so gay and lively, and elegant, and the fuss he made about me! I'm sure it nearly drove Selina Salter wild! Now to-morrow will be Wednesday, and every one is coming, so you must get flowers and things and look your best, for the Count is going to bring a friend of his, a Russian prince, my dear! And Spencer Smith is coming for the first time, and I shouldn't wonder if he fell in love with you—for of all the soft young fellows I ever met he is the softest, and so conceited'——&c., &c. And Mrs Berry continued to pour forth her plans, projects, and adventures, till she declared it was time to retire, 'for I'm just dead beat, my dear.'

* * * * *

While Mrs Berry was preparing for repose, Geoffrey Trafford slowly and rather reluctantly prepared for a visit to Madame de Beaumanoir.

He had a billet from her in the morning demanding the reason of his non-appearance the night before, and informing him that she was suffering from *mal de tête* and exhaustion of spirit; that her doors were closed to every one, nevertheless that she would give *him* an opportunity of explaining himself at nine o'clock that evening.

La Marquise received him in her boudoir, which opened on a garden, and was as luxurious and *recherché* as the most fantastic imagination and the most unlimited self-indulgence could desire. Madame herself, in a *robe de chambre* of softest white muslin and Malines lace, with cerise ribbons and sash, and a fillet of the same holding back the studiously disordered masses of her black hair, was lying on a sofa in an attitude of languor and depression. She half rose to receive him, and then, leaning back again, allowed a delicate morsel of an embroidered cerise satin slipper to appear from beneath her robe.

Trafford kissed the fair and jewelled hand extended to him, with deep respect. 'And what evil genius has dared to attack a spirit so bright and strong as yours, *belle amie?*'

Madame de Beaumanoir smiled, a somewhat peculiar smile, but did not reply for a moment. 'Ring, dear friend, she said. On the immediate appearance of a valet she ordered lights, whereupon the man lit up all the *bougies* in the apartment, and they were legion.

Bougies in the hands of gold cupids and Dresden shepherdesses, bronze negroes, and Ninevite dancing girls, in glass girandoles, and oxydised silver sconces, till the chamber was filled with a mild radiance neither oil nor gas could produce. 'It is more cheerful,' said the Marquise, re-settling herself on her sofa as the servant left the room. 'And now, Traffore, why did you desert us yesterday?'

Trafford was prepared for this question.

'You are very good to notice my absence; but I was a victim to family claims. A relative of mine arriving on his way from India to London, found me out, and I could not get rid of him till too late for your dinner-hour; and as I knew that your invitation was general, and also that there was small chance of seeing you *alone*, I was not so careful to present myself as I should otherwise have been.'

'No, I suppose not,' said Madame de Beaumanoir, listlessly. 'However, we were later than usual, for *I* too was out and detained; but it is passed. Now, Monsieur, I hear you are about to leave Paris—is this true?'

'I have been about to leave Paris for nearly three weeks, and am still here, and still about to leave.'

'It is difficult then—this departure?'

'Desperately difficult,' he replied, with unmistakable sincerity.

Madame de Beaumanoir rose from her seat, swept slowly across the room to an open window and leant against the side of it, looking forth into the fragrant garden beneath for a few moments, and then returning paused opposite her guest where he sat in the full light of the wax tapers.

'Traffore,' she said, her dark lustrous eyes looking full into his, 'I have found *le mot de l'énigme*—the spell which holds you back from reciprocating the tender friendship my soul offers to yours. You love, Traffore! and though the object of your love is beneath you in rank and station, you are perhaps experiencing the awful absorption of a great passion? Is it not so, *mon ami?*'

Trafford was utterly astonished by Madame de Beaumanoir's unexpected attack, but not the less firmly resolved that she should extract nothing from him to confirm her suspicions.

'Pray complete my surprise, very dear lady, by naming the object of my great passion,' and he laughed pleasantly.

'No, I cannot tell you her name, but I will describe her. She is an English-looking child, with the colourless grey eye of your nation, and brown hair; with dewy, rosy lips, parted slightly by

the happy smile of youth, and rounded cheeks, fresh with the peachy softness of youth's unapproachable tint.'

'Whom *can* you mean?' said Trafford, gazing at her astonished, yet gathering himself up to be ready for the next *coup*.

'I mean the girl who was sitting by you as you drove through the Barrière de l'Etoile last evening, *traître!*' cried the Marquise, hurling the term '*traître*' at him with dramatic force.

'I am no traitor, Madame,' said Trafford, carelessly. 'You have indeed quite solved the enigma,' he continued, smiling. 'The English child you mention is a young *pensionnaire*, whose people made me promise I would visit and show some kindness to her; so being disengaged last night I thought it a good opportunity to take her to the Bois de Boulogne.'

His easy unembarrassed manner somewhat disarmed Madame de Beaumanoir. 'Who is she then?'

'Dear lady, whether she be Brown, Jones, or Robinson, to you she would be equally unknown.'

'*Bon Dieu!*' cried the Marquise. 'What a people! To trust young girls thus in the hands of men such as you.'

'Why not?' asked Trafford. 'We are rational civilised men—not wild beasts.'

'There is a basis of the *bête* in most of you, nevertheless; and, Traffore, is there then no *liaison* between this fair child and yourself?'

'Not a shadow of such a thing, Madame,' he replied, looking straight into her eyes.

'I cannot doubt you; and if so, may I not be of use to your young friend?' she asked insinuatingly. 'I should be happy to take her out on her free days.'

'What a deep, handsome, devil of a woman,' thought Trafford. 'Ah! Madame,' he said aloud, 'your impulses are all generosity and goodness; but my little friend is on the point of returning to England, therefore'——

'Ah!' said the Marquise—a long-drawn 'Ah!' 'And Monsieur is about to leave Paris?'

'There is no connection between our movements,' returned Trafford, laughing merrily. 'I may see her once more before leaving, but after, I suppose, nothing is so improbable as that our roads should cross.'

'There is truth in your voice, Traffore,' said Madame de Beaumanoir, and she nearly meant it. 'Pardon, if the sincerity of my

friendship seems intrusive, but I know so well the enormous importance a man's *liaisons* possess. Strive, dear friend,' she continued in a highly moral tone, 'to select for confidants and sympathisers women whose social rank and high character place their disinterestedness beyond question; and, notwithstanding the moral confusion existing in your national habits, avoid the impropriety of being seen (in broad daylight) with obscure unmarried females.' Here she paused abruptly, and pressing her handkerchief to her eyes lay back on her sofa and abandoned one hand to Trafford, murmuring broken sentences touching her 'desolated heart,' 'the tender sympathies of a high-souled friendship,' and 'the exhaustion which follows painful excitement.'

Trafford, as in duty bound, pressed the fair hand in both of his and even kissed it, while he uttered correct phrases expressive of gratitude and devotion, inwardly speculating 'why the deuce she did not insist on hearing the name of his companion of the evening before.' And Madame la Marquise, as she softly returned the pressure of his hand, reflected 'He does not volunteer the name, and there would be no use in asking it. There's mischief somewhere and I'll find it out, though a man so glacial is scarce worth this trouble.' At this critical point of the interview a low and submissive tap at the door made itself heard. Trafford released Madame's hand, and Madame sat straight up in a moment.

'*Entrez*,' she cried, whereupon entered *M. le mari*, who stood looking very properly ashamed of his own temerity as he perceived Trafford.

'A thousand pardons, *chère amie*. I understood you were suffering, and positively not visible to *any* one. I therefore came to make my inquiries in person.'

'You are very good, *cher ami*,' returned Madame la Marquise, sweetly smiling. 'I was *pas visible*, but on receiving Monsieur's name, knowing what is due to a distinguished stranger not quite familiar with our customs, I admitted him. Nay sit down, *cher ami*, and take a cup of coffee with us. You can better entertain Monsieur than I can.'

The conversation soon turned towards caterpillars and centipedes, and on the first available break Trafford took his leave.

* * * * *

Instead of presenting himself at any of the various *salons* of which he possessed the *entrée*, Trafford strolled moodily back to his hotel in deep and unpleasant thought.

'By what devil's cunning did that keen-eyed sentimentalising Frenchwoman divine his state of mind? Who would have dreamed of her having been afloat at that time and coming across us! If I have been the means of drawing the malicious eyes of that woman on Maggie—sweetest, simplest Maggie!—I shall never forgive myself; but I think I have disarmed her. Now the best thing for Maggie and myself is to run off to England or anywhere as fast as I can. Madame la Marquise is not far wrong. I could not have imagined I should have been such an idiot. I think, however, I have sense enough left not to let this pleasant folly deepen into a *grande passion;* it's nothing like that; nevertheless what a wrench it will be to go!' and Trafford crushed his cigar between his teeth as he thought. One thing he was firmly resolved upon, not to quit Paris without one private interview with Miss Grey, to entreat her to leave Mrs Berry, to accept Lady Torchester's offer of friendship and assistance; though how this was to be brought about he did not very well see. But to depart without testifying some interest in her, without knowing something of her plans, would be impossible. His advice too might be of use. Yes, he would see her just once more alone, and then stamp the whole thing out of his mind. He had been hit before and had got over it, and so he should again; only this was somehow not quite like his other experiences; there was such a wonderful yearning tenderness welling up in his heart for that lonely little girl, who had yet so much of strength in the honest womanly pride underlying her character. 'Lemoine,' said Trafford to his servant, throwing himself into an easy-chair, 'get my things together to-morrow, pay up all the bills, and be ready for a start at any moment. I am going to England, but have not decided what day. Give me writing materials, open the window, and leave me. Stay, as the man was going, 'find out for me to-morrow morning if Mrs Berry has returned.'

He opened his portfolio, and took out Maggie's little note of that morning; he laid it before him, and, muttering 'Not a syllable too much—not the smallest opening for a reply or a visit,' leant his elbows on the table and his head on his hands for a minute or two, looking intently on the morsel of writing, then very quietly and deliberately tore it into the smallest fragments, lit a fresh cigar, and drawing the ink towards him, commenced a letter with 'My dear Bolton.'

He wrote long and closely, sometimes pausing to think with

slightly knit brow. It was the most purpose-like and satisfactory letter the family solicitor had ever received from his favourite Trafford. It dealt clearly and definitely with the question of his future plans, with his special views of life and ambition; it spoke of a possible future political career, of the prosecution of his profession, and there was not one syllable of witty cynicism in it from beginning to end. Dry and common-sensical as it read, Bolton would have been a little startled could he have known that throughout it Trafford had fought hard against an almost overpowering inclination to lie back in his chair and live over again the delicious moments of the evening before, to recall the fascination that crept over him as he watched the dawning look, half wonder, half consciousness, in a pair of soft grey eyes into which he had no business whatever to look! But he did fight the battle, sternly and successfully —so finished his letter. Then he descended to the smoking-room, and enjoyed a long rambling discussion with some American gentleman on turfy, political, mercantile, and dramatic subjects, and so kept thought at bay.

Mrs Berry appeared the next morning like a giant refreshed, and was unusually cordial to Maggie, who quite cheered up under this encouragement. It was so natural—so like the old times (a full fortnight old) between which and the present a great gulf had opened—to discuss dress, and commissariat, and contrivances how to save *sous* while they expended a sovereign, that she began to think she had been making a great fool of herself in attributing so much meaning to Trafford's looks and tones. 'I must have been growing morbid and ridiculous,' she thought, 'to dwell upon what was no doubt kindly politeness, and now all things will return to their old pleasant easy footing, and I shall see him without embarrassment in the presence of others.' So the day passed cheerfully, except that Maggie was a little startled on entering the *salon* in the afternoon to find M. de Bragance seated there writing as if quite at home. Mrs Berry was in her room, but did not seem in the least surprised at Maggie's announcement, but despatched her with Rosalie to a florist's at some distance to procure plants and bouquets, and Maggie did not feel quite so comfortable again.

Mrs Berry's reception was well attended that evening, all the usual set were present, and in addition Mr Spencer Smith, a small, pale, 'yellow-haired laddie,' with a faint dust-coloured moustache, imperceptible but for his constant strokings.

He had, of course, a proper amount of rings and studs, and an

eye-glass, and seemed inclined to be *aux petits soins* with Miss Maclaggan. The promised Russian prince was duly produced; he proved to be a small and extremely well preserved specimen of the race—somewhat dried up in the process, and with a complexion suggestive of orange peel, red pepper, and caviare. However, he wore several orders, took snuff with a courtly air, and told Mrs Berry that she reminded him strongly of the Princess Zavadoskoi—a charming creature, now expiating political and other sins in Siberia.

'Gracious! you don't say so?' was Mrs Berry's commentary. 'I hope no one will transport me there.'

''Tis for Madame to transport, not to be transported,' replied Monsieur le Prince with a smile, a shrug, and an artistically administered pinch of snuff.

Maggie made tea and looked on amused. She, from some undefined reason, had done her best to look well. She had ironed out her best white muslin, and remade the blue bows. She had tied a blue ribbon through her hair, and piled the soft nut-brown tresses over it very becomingly, and as she sat behind her tea-pot, more than once wondered to herself 'if Mr Trafford would come, or if he would know that Mrs Berry had a reception; but how could he know?' Even while she mooted the subject, she saw him through the curtained door-way, in the *salon*, bending to speak to Miss Salter. He conversed with her some little time, and then talked with the Prince, whom he seemed to have known previously, and so worked his way to the tea-table, which was nearly deserted. Maggie was now quite prepared to meet him, and showed no sign beyond the faintest increase of colour. She fancied he looked a little haggard, and his eyes more deeply set than ever; but how different was his look and bearing from the others! Could it be possible that only the day before yesterday she was away driving and dining with him all alone! What ages ago that seemed!

Trafford, however, greeted her in the most charmingly easy friendly tone possible, congratulated her on the return of Mrs Berry, inquired for Rosalie, remarked upon the Prince, whom he met at Teheran, and asked what she thought of certain articles in the 'Westminster.' Their expedition to the Bois de Boulogne seemed to have passed utterly out of his memory. How delighted and grateful Maggie felt—how bright and animated she grew, with the feeling of complete relief! Yes, she had quite mistaken

him, and he should never know what a conceited little goose she had been.

But Trafford did not stay long beside her; he went and came, and made himself generally agreeable, nevertheless conveying to Maggie a quiet happy sense of sympathy. Once he disturbed her a little by asking, 'Anything settled between your friend and De Bragance? It strikes me they understand each other.'

'I hope not—I earnestly hope not,' said Maggie.

'What will be will be,' said Trafford, oracularly, and again he sat down by her for a few minutes.

'I have had another letter from Torchester; he is most pressing about my joining him in London.'

'And shall you go?'

'Yes, I think I had better; but I shall see you again, Miss Grey. My movements are rather uncertain. I have been leaving Paris for the last three weeks, but I must go some time.' Soon after he said 'Good night, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XVI.

Mrs Berry from this time was a constant puzzle to Maggie. She was not unkind, but she was preoccupied, and strangely reticent. She constantly sent Maggie out on distant errands, or set her long tasks of millinery and needlework, which could not be performed in the *salon*. The sprightly widow seemed more thoughtful, more indisposed to outlay and dissipation, than before her visit to Fontainebleau, and Maggie's perceptions, quickened by Trafford's remark, inclined her to think that her protectress must be in some way entangled with the Count De Bragance. A week after Mrs Berry's last reception had nearly elapsed, and all things continued in the same unsettled, unexplained state. Trafford had called twice when they were out, and was once received by Mrs Berry, while Maggie, chained, not to the oar, but the scissors, dared not leave her work, and was not sent for. This was a trial harder to bear than she liked to confess to herself.

At last Maggie determined to break through the uncomfortable silence and estrangement which had grown up so unaccountably between her protectress and herself. The explanation came about easily enough one morning after a long and difficult discussion as to the most judicious style of trimming a cleaned white alpaca.

'Well, after all, Maggie, I believe you are right; cerise ribbon and black lace will make it like new. And, Maggie, there's that violet-and-black silk of mine—the body doesn't fit well; but I have worn it very little—indeed it's as good as new. However, Maggie, you are welcome to it; you have always been a good girl to me. What a sin and a shame it was you didn't marry the Earl!'

'We would both have repented it, I am sure. And, dear Mrs Berry, you are so kind, that I feel I must say how anxious and uneasy I am about you and everything. I know there's some change taking place. Don't think me inquisitive, but are you—are you engaged to M. De Bragance?'

'Why, Maggie, it's really no affair of yours,' began Mrs Berry, with some attempt at dignity; but then, suddenly changing her tone, she exclaimed, 'Well, then, I am; and there's an end of it!'

'Oh, how sorry I am to hear you say so!' cried Maggie, with unmistakable sincerity.

'Why, my dear, I dare say it will be a great break-up to you. But lor', Maggie, if you go back to the old shop and advertise you'll pick up something quite as good, though I don't think you'll find another like me in a hurry. Anyhow, you needn't grudge me a husband. But I'll be bound you're sorry enough you didn't take Lord Torchester, now.'

'Ah, Mrs Berry, how little you know me and what I mean! I am sorry because I cannot like the Count—because I am sure he will not make you happy—because—because—for every reason. Have you written to Mr Dunsford about it? Pray, pray do not do anything rash without consulting him.'

'I declare, Maggie, one would think I was going to risk my life, or something dreadful of that sort.'

'And so you are, dear Mrs Berry; I am sure marriage *is* risking your life. Now, *have* you written to Mr Dunsford about money and character and all that?'

'My goodness, what a mercenary little creature you are! No, I have not written to Mr Dunsford, but I am going to. You see, the Count is engaged in a little political matter just now. It will soon be settled; but until it is he doesn't like (more for the sake

of others than himself) to draw the attention of a stiff English lawyer, like Dunsford, on him. But as soon as he gives me leave I'll write and tell Dunsford; for the Count is anxious to do everything handsome about settlements and all that.'

'Oh, Mrs Berry, how I wish we were safe in London!' sighed Maggie, overwhelmed by this glimpse of the Count's surroundings. 'I cannot help feeling very miserable about you. Do, do promise me that you will never marry him without Mr Dunsford's knowledge—his full knowledge of everything.'

'Lor', child! I am not such a fool. But indeed the Count is horrid jealous, and *so* foolish about me (though he tries to conceal it before faces) that he is quite miserable till this political business is at an end and everything can be settled and declared.'

'Well, Mrs Berry, do pray tell Mr Dunsford at once. Why should M. De Bragance's politics keep you from consulting so sensible a friend if they were not dangerous and wrong?'

'Oh, that's all you know about it. I can tell you there is a very brilliant career before *me*. People little know the changes that's going to be.'

'All I hope and pray is that you may be happy,' cried poor Maggie, tears in her eyes and despair in her voice, utterly aghast at this revelation of the widow's folly and credulity, on which De Bragance was evidently playing for some reason.—All she could now do for her friend was to keep her up to her resolution not to marry without consulting Mr Dunsford; for to fight against the Count's influence was impossible.

'Lor', Maggie, don't be making yourself unhappy for nothing; and above all, child, don't let out a word about us being engaged—to *no* one. The Count says it is essential to keep everything quiet in order to—to—oh, to frustrate his enemies, in short. Now, mind you don't say one word to any one.'

'I will not, as you wish it, Mrs Berry.'

'So now you understand everything, you can keep out of the way when the Count comes, and I'll look out all sorts of things that may be of use to you. I'd like you to stay with me to the last—till I'm Countess De Bragance; but then I'm afraid you must go; for, to tell you the truth, the Count's no fonder of you than you are of him. However, I'll pay your fare back and give you a present into the bargain when the time comes, though you have been considerably over the year with me, Maggie.'

'Oh, you have always been most kind and generous to me,' cried

Maggie, with hearty gratitude, though quite bewildered by the complete change coming on so fast, and scarcely heeding the confidences which, the barrier once broken, Mrs Berry proceeded to pour into her unsympathising bosom touching the doubts and fears which had kept the Count silent, his sufferings lest his love should not be reciprocated, his distinguished position, his political importance, &c., &c., &c., until she was interrupted by the announcement that the subject of her commentaries awaited her in the *salon*.

'Well, Maggie, you might go out and get the cerise ribbon; it will divert your mind—rouse you out of the blues.'

But this desirable end was not so easy of accomplishment; Maggie was thoroughly depressed. Mrs Berry's destiny seemed so dreadful, and she herself utterly powerless to prevent it. There was nothing to be done but to resign herself to the eddies and currents of life's stream and let them carry her whither they would.

It was altogether a dull day, for Mrs Berry went out in the evening, and Maggie, in spite of her better judgment, longed very intensely that Trafford might call; for though she must not tell him of the widow's engagement they could speak of it as a thing that might be, and his opinion or advice or anything he might say about it would be sure to be wise and worthy of note. At any rate, he surely would not leave without saying good-bye. And then all his books and papers—how was she to return them to him unless he sent for them? So Maggie stitched away at the cerise *garniture*, conjuring up Trafford's dark face and deep-set eyes and sweet lingering smile so vividly, that at last she started quite ashamed of herself, and turned her thoughts away to the old tender home and the mother love, still her dearest, holiest memory, till the tears, of which she was unconscious, dropped on some of the sacred cerise ribbon and made her feel a guilty wretch indeed.

'I wonder what will become of me ultimately,' she thought, as 'she smoothed her work and folded it right,' like Lord Houghton's charming 'fair little girl.' 'I suppose I shall have to go to Beverly Street, for a while at all events. Heigho! I wish I did not hate my aunt so much, or that I could have poor Uncle Grey all to myself to make him happy, for I do not think any of them care for him.'

And so she rose up and sought for a book wherewith to employ her rebel thoughts, as she must not dream of seeking her pillow till Mrs Berry returned.

'I say, Maggie,' cried Mrs Berry the next morning, when her breakfast was brought, 'I am not going to receive to-night. All our set have agreed to go to Mabille, just to see the fun, and Spencer Smith gives us a supper after. I would take you, only there is not a gentleman to take care of you, and you can't go to Mabille without.'

'Oh, do not mind about me,' said Maggie contentedly, quite glad to be released from the reception. 'I can stay at home very well, and read or work.'

The rendezvous for the party to Mabille was at the Baroness's apartments, so Maggie was left alone somewhat early, but found it not so easy to carry out her intention of enjoying a long and uninterrupted treat of reading in peace. Uneasy thoughts would obtrude themselves—a great and unutterable horror of returning to her aunt—of losing sight of such glimpses of a more polished and higher-toned world as her life with Mrs Berry had afforded her; and then she wondered vaguely that neither Bell nor Jemima had answered either of her last letters—so long a lapse in even their intermittent correspondence was strange; but they were always negligent. And so she passed further out of the realms of distinct thought into dreamland, and sat long, her elbow on the table, one hand supporting her head, the other turning slowly over and over the pages she did not see.

At last Rosalie startled her by entering noisily with the lamp, which she placed on the table, exclaiming, '*Voilà, monsieur, qui vous cherche,*' and was immediately followed by Trafford.

'Now, as Mademoiselle will not be alone,' continued Rosalie, 'I shall go and make a visit to my poor brother, who is very suffering! quite near this, and return in a little quarter of an hour. So, without waiting a reply, Rosalie took herself off.

'No reception to-night, Miss Grey! Is the fair widow "woo'd and married and a'," that such a *bouleversement* of the established order of things has occurred?' asked Trafford, seating himself at the table, while Maggie, a little—only a little—surprised, closed her book.

'No, no,' she said, smiling, the quick bright blush which had risen to her cheek at his first address dying away. 'But it seems the people who usually come here have agreed to go to Mabille instead. So I have had a quiet evening all to myself, which I was very glad of.'

'I can imagine that,' said Trafford, shading his eyes with his

hand, as if from the lamp, that he might unnoticed take a long, and, as he intended, last look at the fair fresh face, the pensive mobile mouth, and clear frank eyes opposite to him. Neither did he mention that he happened to have seen the party aforesaid go into the famous gardens as he strolled to and fro, uncertain whether he would put himself to the pain of seeing Maggie surrounded by Mrs Berry's set. 'And,' he continued, 'you have been consoling yourself with a novel?'

'An unusual treat to me,' returned Maggie, and proceeded to speak of some of the characters from a sort of dread of silence. Trafford was unusually silent, though brimming over with words he must not speak.

At length, struck by his remarkable stillness, Maggie stopped short, and with a quick glance at his face, which looked haggard and thinner than ever, said softly and timidly, 'Are you quite well, Mr Trafford? You look ill.'

'Ill enough,' he returned, without thinking, and then hastily added: 'There is nothing the matter with me—but—but I am glad to have an opportunity of seeing you quietly. Miss Grey, I leave Paris to-morrow.'

This was the upshot of the many studies he had made of *tours de phrases* in which he should best break the trying intelligence; for without coxcombry he feared, honestly feared, that he might cause pain to that untried simple heart. Now he had blurted out the whole truth, and noted with a most illogical mingling of pain and pleasure how Maggie's little hands involuntarily clasped themselves together and her lip quivered for a moment, even while she exclaimed, with a frankness that belied these symptoms:

'Leave Paris to-morrow? I *am* so sorry!'

'Yet I can be but a small loss to you,' said Trafford, with reviving animation, irresistibly impelled to play with fire, to his own cost and detriment. 'I have never been able to be of use to you as I should like, or'——he paused abruptly and lost the thread of his discourse in a great longing to take both her hands in his and tell her what an awful wrench this parting was.

'Is he really pained to part with me, and too proud to own it?' thought Maggie. 'He is not like himself.' 'You have always been very good to me,' she said aloud, determined not to show any weakness herself, though how her heart beat Trafford little imagined; 'you have shown me great consideration, and understood

me, and I never met any one to take *that* trouble before; but I suppose it was no trouble to you.'

Maggie meant a high tribute to his knowledge of character, and when Trafford answered absently, 'Not much,' considered he had formed no very high estimate of her.

'But I have a quantity of books and papers of yours,' was her next remark, after a short awkward silence. 'How am I to return them, and Rosalie is gone out?'

'They are not of the slightest consequence; do not trouble about them. And now listen to me,' moving to a low ottoman beside her; 'let us talk in the plainest most common-sense style. Promise not to quarrel with what I say.'

'Indeed I will not,' returned Maggie, taking up her work. There was such a sweet fulness of anticipative pardon in her voice and smile that Trafford rose and paced once or twice to and fro before he could quite command the common-place tone he proposed to use. 'This widow of yours is going to make a fool of herself very soon, that is tolerably evident, and you cannot live on with Madame la Comtesse De Bragance?'

'Of course not. I shall not be asked.'

'Well then, do put down your work and look at me while I speak.' This was said imploringly, and Maggie obeyed, looking straight at him for a second, and then gradually dropping her eyelids.

'Well then—you'll have to return to your aunt, and what will become of you there, Maggie?' Her name came out so naturally that neither of them noticed it.

'Oh, I shall not be there long I hope,' she said, rather dejectedly.

'It is all awfully uncertain. Now I shall see Lady Torchester the day after to-morrow, and she will certainly ask about you. May I not tell her that you will soon be disengaged and glad to find a quiet comfortable home somewhere? I can add my own opinion of you, you know, as a very obstinate, high-spirited young lady, who will not yield an inch to any one; but—on the whole, not a disagreeable companion. You cannot possibly object to this, and if Lady Torchester writes to you you will reply?'

'Yes, to be sure I shall,' cried Maggie. 'Do you think me so unreasonable or so ill-bred as to leave a kindness unacknowledged, or reject any chance of independence? Though I would much

rather not have it through Lady Torchester, for I don't want ever to meet Lord Torchester or——in short I want to forget all about it, and she recommenced her work with an air of resolution.

'What!' exclaimed Trafford, for he could not keep back the words, 'do you wish to forget all and every one connected with Tor's disappointment? Will you wipe me out with the rest?'

'No,' replied Maggie, half surprised at the coolness lent her by pride, which would not let her for a moment seem to accept the implied tenderness for an open avowal of which she was too lowly. 'No. I never wish to forget the real kindness *you* have shown me; and,' she continued, with a beating heart and voice she could scarce keep steady, yet determined to show she wanted nothing from him, 'it is so odd that we should be such friends—it is even strange we should ever have met, our places are so widely apart. I suppose after this we shall never meet again; but I shall ever remember that all through your anxiety to save your cousin from an unequal match you did me justice and never wounded me. I hope you will remember (if you remember anything about it) that I heartily acknowledge this, and am obliged to you.' She stopped abruptly, feeling as if she had said too much.

'Remember!' muttered Trafford, half to himself. 'I shall remember longer and more than you think;' and then a long silence ensued. Trafford was at once relieved, yet a little mortified at Maggie's tone. It was impossible so young and candid a creature could completely disguise her sentiments if she cared for him, and it was better so—much better; particularly as there could be no harm in his staying a little longer. So he roused himself and talked of Lord Torchester and the likeness Maggie had perceived in him to her cousin John Grey; but the conversation languished. If Maggie was composed, she was also spiritless, and Trafford gathered himself up for the effort of saying good-bye.

'Do not let me commit the stupidity of forgetting to take your address should Lady Torchester want to write to you.'

'I hardly know where. I am sure we shall soon leave Paris. I had better give you my uncle's—No. 1, Beverly Street.'

'Pray write it.' So Maggie hastily wrote down, 'M. Grey, care of Mr John Grey, chemist, 1, Beverly Street.'

'That will always find me,' she said, giving it to him; 'though I feel as if I were adrift. I think I should like to be on the Continent again. Life is easier and pleasanter than in England.'

'Life is a tremendous puzzle!'

'And rather a sad one, I think,' said poor Maggie.

'Well, I must go,' replied Trafford, slowly folding up the morsel of paper on which Maggie had written her address, and placing it in his pocket-book, feeling that he must cut the interview short if he was to retreat with any credit. 'Good-bye, then,' he said, rising and taking her hand. 'I am glad you do not quite reject my offer of Lady Torchester's assistance.'

'Good-bye,' said Maggie simply, and Trafford turned away, but as he reached the door he felt he could not leave her thus, and coming quickly back took her cold hand in both of his.

'Maggie,' said he, looking intently down into her eyes, and speaking hurriedly, 'should you be in real trouble or difficulty, should your aunt or any one else be intolerable, promise to write to me—write to Lady Torchester's care, if you will. "The Beeches, Richmond," or "St James Square," will always find her; and my club is "The Travellers." Don't fancy yourself without friends; life is hard enough, and wants no sensation of loneliness to darken it more. Promise me this, dear Maggie.'

'Yes, I will if I need it,' murmured Maggie, almost stunned by this exhibition of feeling and interest.

'It is a promise, mind, and I expect you to keep it,' returned Trafford; then pressing her hand almost painfully, he repeated, 'Good-bye then, Maggie, good-bye,' and went away so quickly that she heard the outer door shut before she quite understood he was gone.

And then what an awful desolation fell upon her;—even a darkness that might be felt. Had she indeed seen the last of him? Was her life henceforth to be all gloom? Was it possible that with her knowledge of the barrier between them—a barrier, the width of which, with all his chivalrous courtesy and playful tenderness, he had never for a moment sought to lessen or disguise—she had let this man twine himself round her heart till she felt as if she could sacrifice pride and reserve, and past and future, just to hear his voice once more, in those accents which said more than words—to feel the clasp of his hand upon her own. 'What shall I do? How can I bear it?' she exclaimed aloud, secure in her loneliness and frightened at the intensity of her own feelings, the depths of which had never before been stirred. Yet, the first moments of agitation over, she struggled gallantly against the tide of her grief.

Maggie was no logician in her coolest moments, and now especially was incapable of reason; but the fixed underlying feminine instinct, which has probably kept more women straight than religion,

morality, and calculation put together, the true instinct that woman 'should not unsought be won,' which she possessed very strongly, came to her aid, and she cried shame upon herself for thus casting her full heart before a man who didn't want it.

Of course it was plain enough that he felt keenly parting with her, that he liked her at any rate beyond the average of an every-day acquaintance. She was not utterly 'unsought;' but if he had given her a tithe of the affection *she* lavished on him would he submit to this separation? He was no great lord like his cousin, with a noble mother whose proud heart might break under the load of a *mésalliance;* he had no clearly defined 'caste' duties to restrain the impulses of his heart. 'No,' thought Maggie, 'I must not exaggerate looks and tones and chance words; he could only have felt kindly friendship for a girl, whom, though she amused him, he certainly respected, and that is a comfort;' then with the genuine humility which, in characters like Maggie's, exists quite apart from the smallest tinge of self-abasement, she thought over the small inducements she possessed to draw a man like Trafford out of his own sphere to take a lowly and ungifted girl like herself to wife: 'Of course, it is too absurd to think of, and I must try and put him quite out of my head. It seems as if I never could cease to see him now, but if I try hard I may grow quiet and hopeful again. I wish he had gone away with Lord Torchester. I did not care for him so much then—but I *did* care though, too much, even then. What a fool I am!'

So she sat there dreaming and fighting against her dreams, and although perhaps high and philosophic minds might disdain the curious jumble which Maggie would have termed thinking, she fought a good fight in that lonely hour—a fight which, if some delicate decorations and delusions were tarnished and destroyed, left an increase of strength behind it.

When Rosalie returned she was surprised and rather offended to find that Monsieur had gone—gone a long time. 'Mais, mon Dieu! laisser une charmante demoiselle comme vous toute seule! Ah! il est Anglais, bien entendu!'

'Rosalie,' said Maggie, deeply grateful that the 'little quarter of an hour' had stretched into half a dozen, and left her the inestimable advantage of utter solitude in which to do battle; 'Rosalie, I have worked and written till my eyes and head ache. I *must* go to bed. If you cannot manage to undress Mrs Berry when she comes in, call me, and I will get up; I fancy she will be late.'

'Allez au lit, mon ange,' returned Rosalie genially; 'je ferai l'impossible pour vous donner de repos.' And as Maggie retreated she muttered, 'Je crains que tout ne va pas bien là bas. Quant à cette poupée de femme, elle est trop bien servie, ma foi!'

* * * * *

Mrs Berry was far too much occupied in her own concerns to notice whether any change had come o'er the spirit of Maggie's life during the week which followed Trafford's departure; and indeed it would have puzzled so superficial an observer to distinguish the subtle difference that was to be felt rather than seen in her young *protégée*. For Maggie fought bravely against sentiment and depression, and had the great assistance of feeling that none save herself knew her weakness. Moreover, although her religious knowledge and aspirations had, since her mother's death, had little to extend or foster them, and she was strangely ignorant of the merits of High or Low Church, she was yet happy in thoroughly believing in a Providence that shapes our ends—an almighty Father who would deign to accept the service of an honest life and hear the prayer of an earnest heart. Had she been asked what was her religious creed she would no doubt have rehearsed correctly 'The Articles of the Christian Faith;' but how much of these she believed with the understanding and the heart she never stopped to question. Her faithful chronicler is quite ready to affirm that the substance of her religion is contained in the above summary. She was therefore not quite without consolation.

'Maggie,' said Mrs Berry, about a week after this parting had nearly pressed the life out of her *protégée's* young heart, 'Maggie, can we pack up everything and pay up everything to-morrow, so as to be able to start the day after for England?'

'Start for England the day after to-morrow!' cried Maggie, delighted. 'I don't think it is possible, but I will do my best. I will go and look over the bills at once; the only thing really to come is Madame Delplanque's, and you had better see about that yourself. Still I do not see how we can get off on Thursday.'

'Well, we must, that is the long and short of it. The Count says he will meet us at Dover on Thursday, so we must go.'

'The Count!' repeated Maggie dismayed. She had nearly forgotten him, for he too had disappeared suddenly, at least, she had not seen him since the memorable evening of the party to Mabille. 'I suppose then we are bound for London?' added Maggie, rather

eagerly, anxious to bring the widow within the common-sense influence of Mr Dunsford.

'Yes, I suppose so, replied Mrs Berry, evasively, 'but never mind just now. You go and speak to Rosalie. I suppose I must pay her a month for nothing at all.'

'Of course,' returned Maggie, who at once plunged into the fatigue and bewilderment of such a sudden move with a right good will that bore her triumphantly through all her difficulties. The constant movement, the more than complete occupation, were a wonderful relief after the weary monotony of her mental strife; and when on the destined Thursday she followed Mrs Berry into the luggage-laden *fiacre* that was to take them to the station, though every limb ached with fatigue, she felt more freshness of spirit than she had known for many days.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE London season was at the spring-tide, in the fullest flood, when Trafford found himself once more in the Albany.

Lord Torchester had never got further than the great metropolis, having been swept into the social maelstrom, where he found an excellent place assigned him—and Trafford was much struck and amused by the increase of self-possession and worldly tact which the young earl appeared to have acquired, even in the short space of four or five weeks. He had begged Trafford to join him, and was very pleased to see him; but he evidently had not a disengaged moment, and Trafford, for whom London had none of the charms it possessed for his cousin, quickly determined to seek somewhere else the change of scene and thought he felt he must have.

A great friend of his, an artist, as yet scarcely known (for Geoffrey Trafford had many dear friends in Bohemia), was about to start for Bordeaux, intending to sketch among the picturesque old towns of Aquitaine, and then to push on to the Pyrenees. Trafford proposed to accompany him so far. There was a good deal of the artist in his nature, and he was an immense favourite

among the pleasant, careless, ready-witted knights of the brush and the pen; who declared him to be a good fellow though unavoidably a fine gentleman, and as ready to rough it in any of their expeditions as the poorest among them. But first he must see Lady Torchester and Bolton. His aunt, on the occasion of his dining with her the day after his arrival, had been surrounded by a large party of her own peculiar people. He had, therefore, no opportunity of executing his self-imposed mission.

The stamp of the busy season was nowhere more visible than in the vicinity of Lincoln's Inn. Hansom cabs writhed and twisted through the tortuous approaches, coming out into its comparative quiet from beneath mysterious archways, and depositing anxious-looking clients, pale lawyers, florid country gentlemen—doomed flies on the edge of that web of courts which spreads its meshes between the so-called 'Fields' and Chancery Lane. The dusty heated faces that looked out from under those terrible horsehair wigs, which at once proclaim and punish the limbs of the law, were visibly in need of sea baths and fresh air, as the owners thereof whisked from one court to another, the tails of their gowns fluttering behind them.

In a large, quiet, cool, back room, on the ground floor of a large dull house on the south side of the above-named fields—a vast house, every room of which was crammed with clerks and papers, and where the scratching of pens ceased not from morn till eve in the everlasting task of wrapping up the sense of facts in a mist of words—in this cool, big, back room, enthroned in state, sat Mr Bolton, head of the great firm of Bolton and Lee, a prince among solicitors, a depository of aristocratic secrets from whose penetrating eyes no client's little weaknesses were hidden. He was dictating a letter to a doughy looking clerk, who took down his utterances in shorthand. As he spoke, another youth entered with a slip of paper, at which Mr Bolton glanced, and saying shortly, 'In five minutes,' continued his letter to the end. Whereupon the doughy looking clerk vanished, and shortly after Mr Geoffrey Trafford was ushered in.

'Very glad to see you,' said Bolton, shaking hands with him cordially. 'When did you return? I began to be afraid you would never come back.'

'I arrived a few days ago,' said Trafford, drawing a chair in front of Bolton's table.

'Can't say you are looking the better of your stay in Paris;

though you seem to have done the state great service. I suppose you have seen the Countess, and received the ovation she had prepared for you? You certainly have been the salvation of her son.'

'Nothing of the kind, I assure you,' said Trafford impatiently. 'I did nothing, could do nothing. The luck of the family was in the ascendant, and Torchester is a free man. Yes, I dined with my aunt on Tuesday, and was glad to see her so cheerful and content. I am going out of town again next week, so I thought I would have a talk with you, and hear what you have been doing.'

'Quite right, Mr Trafford. By the way, your last from Paris gave me great pleasure. Though you commit yourself to nothing, I could see the promise of a political career. I have my eyes open for the first chance of a seat. I had a talk with our honest Mudborough representative; but I am sorely afraid you are too liberal for that constituency.'

'I think I am,' said Trafford, absently.

'By the way, I have put all your available capital into Oldham and Garret—you gave me *carte blanche*.'

'I have no doubt you have done well,' returned Trafford, thoughtfully. 'I suppose there is nothing left'——

'Except the Riversdale Farms,' interrupted Bolton, 'and though they are underlet they bring in a trifle over four hundred a year.'

'One would not starve on that,' said Trafford.

'Starve! My dear sir! your fortune is before you. Why, you will be able to reckon on eight per cent. for your capital; so there is a very decent income to begin upon. Enough to start you on some career free from carking cares, and needing only to think of success.'

Trafford rose, and walked to the window without speaking, and then turning with his pleasant smile to Bolton, exclaimed, 'I am really not worth the trouble you take. Yet I feel rather ashamed of having done nothing but hunt and shoot and fish, for these twenty-five years past. I suppose I have followed my vocation, and for the life of me I cannot find another. I have not a mission of any sort, and I have a strong conviction that England will pull through all her difficulties without my help.'

'She would be all the better for the help of an honest, intelligent, well-educated gentleman, to counterbalance the crowd of officious, self-interested demagogues who force themselves to the front to pick up what they can.'

'Yet if I do join the "crushing crowd," Bolton, I fancy I shall be a bit of a Radical.'

'Be something,' said the energetic old gentleman emphatically. I was brought up a Tory, and I lean to that faction, but were I a young man I should be a Liberal. Whatever one's likings or prejudices, we must go with the spirit of the times, or be thrown out of the race altogether.'

'To tell you the truth,' rejoined Trafford, 'I want to do something, be interested in something, and get rid of this infernal sense of self and isolation that hangs round me like a winding-sheet.' He stopped abruptly at the sight of Bolton's astonished expression of countenance as he listened to such an unwonted outburst from the usually calm debonair Trafford. 'I mean, I am rather sick of myself,' he continued, laughing. 'I suppose I have caught the trick of tall talking from my French acquaintance.'

'My dear young friend, you are not well; you had better see Dr Saville. Now I look at you, you are looking thin and haggard; not half the man you were two months ago.'

'Pooh! nonsense! Seriously, Bolton, I am resolved to make myself a place, but I am going to run over to St Petersburg first. Nothing to be done here during the winter, and St Petersburg is one of the few places I don't know.'

'Come, Mr Trafford, no looking back, once you have put your hand to the plough.'

'But I haven't put my hand to it. Then the Countess wants me to take Torchester in hand and convey him away somewhere north, where his cousin, Miss Wallscourt, is staying; the heiress that is to be, towards whom the pious Countess' feelings are somewhat tinged with the old leaven. But if she thinks that because I was ready to mar one marriage I am willing to make another, she is much mistaken. From henceforth my revered cousin must manage his love affairs himself. He will be all right now.'

'I suppose so. But, my dear Mr Trafford, I always thought the young lady in question would exactly suit you. Lady Torchester ought to remember the Earl has come in to a highly improved and improvable estate; while you—well, you would undoubtedly be the better of an heiress-wife. You know Miss Wallscourt?'

'Yes—that is, I knew her as a child and a very young girl, a pretty and uncommonly self-willed little thing. She must be one or two and twenty now. No, Bolton, my fancies do not lead that way; I don't care for matrimony. I'll tell you what I'll do. I

will amuse myself and make up my political mind till Christmas, and then I'll come into residence in this huge market and do something. I will: not to please you only; to please myself.'

'If you begin in that spirit, you will succeed. But an heiress is not to be despised; such an heiress, well bred, well born, a family connection, no objectionable blood ties, sufficient good looks, et cetera, to do away with a mercenary air—eh?'

Trafford took up his hat and rose lazily. Leaning his arm on the chimney-piece, he remarked.

'I begin seriously to doubt whether education and civilisation, and all the other botherations, do any good; I mean in the sense of enjoyment. A well-to-do savage in a country full of game has a far jollier life of it than I have, for instance. He can indulge his natural tastes, and not be cribbed, cabined, and confined, with here a barrier of rank and there a rampart of duty, debts to oneself, to one's tailor, to society, and the Lord knows what besides. I think I would go back to North America, were it not for having tasted that fatal tree of knowledge, which somehow spoils the flavour of other fruit.'

'Pooh! nonsense! My young friend, you have always permitted me to assume the character of your Mentor, so I must tell you, your nonsense is not even original. There is no occupation more exhilarating than the struggle to get the better of one's fellow-creatures. Throw yourself into the battle, and we shall hear no more of such thin philosophy. I cannot help thinking, Mr Trafford,' looking keenly at him, 'that you are not well, or—or something.'

Trafford laughed good-humouredly. 'I am well enough, old friend,' he said. 'I only want work, I suppose, and as you have plenty I will take myself away.'

'Where are you going?'

'To dine with Lady Torchester. She wants a *tête-à-tête* dinner, as I start to-morrow. When we met on Thursday 'twas in a crowd. Good-bye, Bolton, and many thanks for your fatherly care of self and belongings.'

'Keep me informed of your movements,' said Mr Bolton, rising and shaking his young friend's hand, 'and don't throw away the "goods the gods provide."'

'*Au revoir*,' returned Trafford, and closed the door on his Mentor.

* * * * *

At the early hour of seven that evening Geoffrey Trafford sat at dinner with his aunt in the handsome but sombre dining-room of The Beeches.

'I am afraid my hours are uncomfortably early for you, Geoffrey,' said the Countess. 'Had I thought, I should have said dinner at eight.'

'My dear aunt, I have dined well at all hours, from eleven till nine; seven is, I think, sensible. I should be shocked had you changed your hour for me.'

'When do you start to-morrow?—Barnes, Mr Trafford will take a little more fish.'

'Thanks. We talk of catching the steamer at Gravesend about two to-morrow.'

'The steamer! By what route do you travel then?'

'By steamer to Bordeaux.'

'Rather an uncomfortable mode of progress!'

'Not to an old salt like myself. No, thanks' (fowl offered); 'lamb.'

'Was Paris very full of English?'

'They were thick as leaves that fall in Vallambrosa.'

A pause, during which Lady Torchester longed for the dessert and uninterrupted confidence.

'Will you not take champagne, Geoffrey?'

'Dear Lady Torchester, no. It would be sacrilege to mix any other vintage with your incomparable Burgundy. I saw Bolton to-day. He was inquiring particularly for your ladyship. What a capital fellow he is!'

'Yes,' returned the Countess slowly, doubtfully. 'Poor dear Lord Torchester had the highest possible opinion of him. But is it not sad to see a man of his age so absorbed in the things of this life? It is curious that neither Mr Badger nor Mr White, both very enlightened men—Torchester's tutors—you remember Mr Badger I am sure?—neither of them liked Mr Bolton. They thought—I do not know exactly what they thought, but they did not like him.'

'No, I fancy not,' said Geoffrey, accepting a segment of iced pudding. 'He certainly is a hopeless heathen in some ways, but you could not have a sounder adviser. I am sure I owe him an unlimited amount of gratitude for all sorts of good services.'

At last dessert was put on and they were alone.

'Now, my dear Geoffrey,' said the Countess, 'I quite long to

hear all details. I had such a hurried talk with you when you were here with all those people. When you went over first how did Torchester receive you?'

'Not very cordially. He evidently thought my visit boded interruption to his plans,' replied Geoffrey, his heart beating a little faster than he expected at this much-wished-for opening, which he meant to use in Maggie's service, while he remembered that it was just a week that very evening since, by such a tremendous effort of self-control, he had bid her good-bye with but indifferent composure. 'I soon saw I could do very little with him, and I much fear my efforts, though guarded, earned me his hearty disgust,' added Trafford, laughing as he remembered the *tête-à-tête* he had so ruthlessly interrupted.

'I am sure, Geoffrey, Torchester is warmly attached to you, and he ought to be. I will always believe that you did somehow save him. I am sure, but for you, this Miss Grey would now be my daughter-in-law.'

As the Countess spoke, an idea flashed across Trafford's mind. 'Could it be that a half-unconscious preference for me decided her against so tempting an offer?' but he put away the thought.

'Miss Grey certainly would have been your daughter-in-law by this time but for herself,' he replied gravely, 'and I do not know another woman who would have acted as she did. Think of the temptation, to even a girl of good position! Torchester was of age—perfectly his own master—a few words, a moment's time, would have changed her from a penniless dependent waif to a peeress of England—to a social position which the commonest good sense and good conduct would have made all her own. Even you would not have turned your back on your son's wife, and every one must feel that Torchester is just the sort of fellow to stand by the woman who bears his name.'

'You are quite right,' cried the Countess eagerly. 'Then why did the young lady let him escape? Perhaps she had not understanding—education enough—to see all these advantages?'

Trafford shook his head and helped himself to some more strawberries. 'She has quite brains enough to comprehend it all. Torchester owes his failure, I mean his escape, to three reasons: first, she was not a tinge in love with him'——

'Yet,' interrupted the mother, 'my boy is certainly attractive.'

'No doubt. But though younger a little in years, Miss Grey has been matured in the school of adversity, and looks on your

boy *as* a boy. Then she had a strong idea that it would make you miserable—this I encouraged; and thirdly, I could see she very wisely thought that when Torchester had cooled down enough to count the cost of his whim, he might think it rather expensive. But my first reason includes all the rest.'

'She must be an uncommonly high-minded young woman,' said Lady Torchester, with measured approbation.

'I suppose she is,' returned Trafford, musingly. 'But, my dear aunt, don't you think it argues a low stand-point of morality when we are roused to admiration by a girl following her own natural healthy instinct for happiness in her own class, instead of standing on tip-toes to snatch that which is far above, out of her reach? Miss Grey has shown soundness of heart and mind.'

'Which are sufficiently rare to be extremely valuable. Is she pretty, Geoffrey? Of course poor Torchester thought so, but it does not therefore follow.'

'She is scarcely pretty; yet your son showed very good taste,' said Trafford, smiling, and answering the real question. 'She is very fair and gentle; you might easily pass her in a crowd; but if you looked at her once you would be sure to look again. There is a quiet harmonious grace about her I cannot quite describe. I fancy it is the result of never *seeming!* her great charm is her wonderful naturalness and earnestness—she'——

'My dear Geoffrey,' interrupted the Countess, with the faintest tinge of suspicion, 'you appear to take a very deep interest in this young person.'

'I do indeed,' said Trafford with disarming frankness and self-possession, looking straight into his aunt's eyes. 'And more, I want *you* to take an interest in her. She is rather unfortunately placed; an orphan, a true-hearted, right-minded girl, utterly dependent on an uncle and aunt sufficiently burdened already, and living with a terrific female—this Mrs Berry—low, ignorant, idiotic, on the point of marriage with a French black-leg.'

'I am sure I should be very happy to be of any use to her,' said Lady Torchester, kindly, 'if you would point out the way. And how did you manage to find out all this, Geoffrey? You must surely have become very intimate with my son's *innamorata?*'

'You see,' replied Trafford, with excessive candour, 'when I found the sort of girl she was I ventured to speak of you, and then she frankly told me that my cousin was safe, as far as she was concerned; so we became great friends, and I gathered what I have

told you partly from conversation, partly from observation. I am sure, my dear aunt, you are too true a woman not to believe that there are men to be found who would gladly help a girl they like and respect without a shade of personal feeling in the matter.'

'They are to be found,' said Lady Torchester, 'but they are not numerous; if however they exist anywhere it will be among the Traffords, for though not brilliant personages, they have ever been true and loyal gentlemen. Now what can I do for this young lady?'

Trafford paused, considerably puzzled, and smiling to himself at the Countess's bit of simple family pride.

'It is easier to say "Do something" than to define what the "something" is to be,' he said, at length. 'I suppose Miss Grey wants to do something, or be something, that will enable her to earn her bread—she has nothing, you know.'

'And what can she do?'

'Oh! I can hardly tell. She speaks French very well, and I think she plays, and I fancy she would read aloud pleasantly. She would be the very thing for some crotchety dowager who had married off her daughters and wanted a nice kindly companion'—and as he said this Trafford groaned in spirit at the idea of consigning dear bright Maggie to such a fate; but it was the best he could do for her.

'I suppose she might suit a crotchety dowager like myself, eh, Geoff?' said the Countess good-humouredly.

'The cap doesn't fit you in the least,' rejoined Trafford.

'Well, I really do not want a companion yet; and besides, think of the danger of her coming in contact with Torchester! It is not to be entertained for a moment! However, I will see what I can do; and'——a pause as though for an effort—'suppose I were to write to her?'

'It would be by far the best plan, and exceedingly kind!' cried Trafford.

'But how could I write to her? It would be a difficult letter, urged Lady Torchester.

'Not at all, my dear aunt, if you just think. Say—oh! say that you have heard so much of her from your son and nephew, and understanding that she is not quite settled with Mrs Berry, you would be happy to be of use if she would inform you how you could serve her—something just to open communications.'

'That would be very vague, and rather in the character of a *carte*

blanche. Nevertheless'—noticing the earnestness of her favourite nephew's countenance—'I *will* write, and try to do something for your *protégée.* Surely she must have some wonderful charm to interest Torchester as a lover and you as a friend!' and Lady Torchester rose as she spoke.

'Once you take the affair into your hands, neither of us need trouble ourselves further. May I not waive ceremony, and be permitted to accompany you to the drawing-room at once?'

'Certainly, if you care to do so,' returned the Countess, flattered by the wish; and the cosy *tête-à-tête* was prolonged by an open window, which permitted the odours of the garden to penetrate the room.

Trafford had said his say and gained his point, and now became a most sympathetic listener to Lady Torchester's plans and projects respecting her son, who was the ocean to the river of her thoughts. Tea proved a pleasant interruption; and after the servants left the Countess sipped hers in thoughtful silence.

Suddenly, as though speaking to herself, she remarked, 'I fancy she would make Mr Blackmore an excellent wife. He would be quite perfect if he had a wife. Her father was an artist, you say?'

'Whose?' asked Trafford, considerably bewildered. 'Maggie's?'

The familiar name dropped with fatal readiness from his lips—he would have given the world to recall it; but Lady Torchester was too engrossed by her own thoughts to heed him, so he escaped.

'Do you mean Miss Grey's father?' repeated Trafford. 'Yes, I believe he was. And who may Mr Blackmore be?'

'Oh! he is the curate at Mount Trafford. Such a pious, earnest, admirable man; but he ought to marry. If you and Torchester are out of the way I shall certainly ask Miss Grey to stay with me; and if I think her worthy of him I shall invite Mr Blackmore to meet her.'

'Worthy of him! Oh! Eros, hear her!' But Trafford's spoken reply was a calm assurance that Miss Grey was, he felt sure, admirably suited to be a clergyman's wife; and then he wrote her address in Paris for his aunt.

'How long do you think of staying among the Pyrenees, Geoffrey?'

'Six weeks, perhaps; certainly not more than two months. I shall want to see Bolton again early in August.'

'Then I hope you are going to Craigmurchan Castle?'

'Lady Macallum asked me in a general way yesterday, but I am not sure. Why do you wish me to go?'

'Because if you go, Torchester will; and though it is not consistent with my views to plan worldly projects, still I think it desirable that Margaret Wallscourt and my son should have an opportunity of meeting. She is not in town this season, on account of the deaths in the family; but I imagine she will be at the Macallums.'

'Well, I have promised Tor to join him at the shootings he has taken, or is going to take, which are within a drive of Craigmurchan. But remember, my dear aunt, that in your or Torchester's matrimonial designs I shall meddle no more. Take my advice: put your trust in Providence, and leave your son alone.'

'Such advice from *you*, Geoffrey, is indeed a rebuke,' said the Countess, with a grave smile.

'An unintentional one.'

'But, Geoffrey, do you not think Margaret exactly the right wife for my son?'

'I cannot possibly say. I have not seen her since she was first in long frocks. If I meet her in Scotland you shall have my opinion.'

After a little more talk, Trafford bid Lady Torchester good-night.

'The braw moon glistened o'er' roadway and hedgerow, villa and cottage, as Trafford drove rapidly and mechanically back to town. Thank God he had interested the Countess in his young friend; for, of course, from henceforth, Maggie was only to be his *protégée;* a good little girl, to be helped, but nothing to him, personally. No, no; he had had enough of that folly, and too much for a man of his age and experience. It was time he should take a more practical view of life; all pleasant things, somehow, were wrong and enervating; so he would see about politics, and write a pamphlet, by Jove! On what? *Noblesse oblige*—'The Obligations of Rank?' Pshaw! it had been done a dozen times already. How well even these roadside boxes look in the moonlight! 'Not a fortnight ago that moon looked on me and Maggie in the Bois de Boulogne. What a delicious evening that was! I would give a year or two to have it over again! How sweet and young and calm she looked; but I never could come out of it so well a second time. I half wish I had had a kiss—just one to remember. Bah! what folly! What a queer imbroglio one's brain is at times! Maggie's kisses, I suppose, are reserved for some blessed Black-

more; these rascal curates get the pick of everything. Hollo! you fellows, do you want the whole of the road?' This was shouted savagely at some carters, whose waggons, piled perilously high with cabbages, were drowsily proceeding townwards.

And so, battling with himself, Geoff Trafford reached his chambers. He glanced through his letters—a vague unacknowledged hope that perhaps that predicted difficulty which was to drive Maggie to him for counsel and help had come! But no. Then he hoped Lady Torchester's letter would find her in Paris, but of course it would. Mrs Berry could never get away suddenly; otherwise, thought Trafford, 'I should be afraid, for her sake, to acknowledge I possessed a further clue to her.'

So he turned over the invitation cards which had already begun to pour in upon him; but loathing all in his inmost soul, sought refuge in his club, where he did find relief and oblivion—in congenial sporting talk.

* * * * *

The next day, in a magnificent flood of sunshine, and with a delicious breeze just dimpling the water, Trafford set out on his travels.

His artist friend was in the highest, the most contagious good spirits. He had sold a couple of pictures unusually well; he had paid his most pressing debts, and for him life had not a cloud. He had a mind, he told Trafford, to winter in Spain, and bring back a wealth of sketches.

There were few passengers besides themselves—and those foreigners; the fare was good, the weather fine; and under these favourable conditions Trafford managed to become more like himself again. It was quite a relief to get rid of that haunting picture of Maggie—slender, brown-haired, bending over her work, or turned slightly from his glance at times, or meeting it fully and frankly when his talk roused her special interest, with her clear, soft, honest grey eyes; or that varying smile—so bright, at times so sad, or a tinge contemptuous. And then there was a composed despondent expression he knew so well, with the head turned away, showing the pretty white young throat and small ear. It was a positive relief to keep these visions at bay—to feel the power of resistance increase; though they would come still. And so the good ship sped away, and the friends reached their destination. Then ensued several weeks of pleasant wandering, during which few letters reached the wanderers. And Trafford almost hoped his folly and weakness were quite cured.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE same evening that lit up the picturesque streets of the Black Prince's capital, to the admiration of Trafford and his friend, was lowering with a heavy oppressive heat over our heroine's original quarters in Beverly Street. Yet an unwonted air of cheerfulness and animation pervaded the chemist's house.

There was no card in the fanlight over the front door, yet the dingy drawing-room was evidently occupied by the family.

The back parlour was encumbered with corded boxes, an open portmanteau, a plethoric hamper, while, though late, the table was loaded with materials for a most substantial tea, and over all beamed—yes, beamed!—Aunt Grey. The corkscrew curls were a shade less wiry, the tightly-closed lips were a trifle relaxed, as she fussed to and fro.

Jemima was putting the last touches to a bonnet of high pretensions, while the worthy chemist was seated at table, partaking of the good things over which the eldest daughter presided.

'I cannot fix this ribbon any way,' exclaimed Jemima, impatiently. 'I must say Maggie was a wonderful help where there was anything to do up; she would twist this into shape in no time.'

'Don't talk nonsense,' said Mrs Grey, sharply. 'You have no perseverance. Maggie ain't cleverer than her neighbours.'

'When did you hear from Maggie last?' asked Mr Grey—his mouth full of poached egg and toast.

'I can hardly tell—oh, about three weeks ago,' said Bell.

'You have written to her, I suppose?' returned her father.

'No, indeed, there has been no time,' put in Mrs Grey.

A loud ring and small knock at the front door interrupted her.

'Whoever is that?'

'It's only Dick playing tricks,' said Jemima.

And the next moment the youth she named rushed in, exclaiming, 'Here's Maggie back again, bag and baggage, in a cab!'

'Don't tell ridiculous stories,' said his mother, undisturbed.

'It is true, though! You come and see.'

Jemima dropped her work and rushed into the hall, while Bell called after her that she was a fool to mind him. But another

sound caught Mrs Grey's ear; she stood still for an instant to listen, and then followed her daughter. A general hubbub of voices ensued, then all came crowding into the room together with Maggie—the veritable Maggie in their midst—very pale and weary-looking, with a travelling bag in her hand, and crowned by a wide-brimmed grey straw hat.

'Maggie, my dear,' cried Uncle John, kindly, 'I am truly pleased to see you. We were just speaking of you.'

'Dear, dear uncle'—a hearty hug and kiss—'how well you are looking! I am so glad to see you—my aunt, too! You all look as bright as possible.'

'And what on earth has brought you back so sudden? cried Aunt Grey, not unkindly. 'Why there's no end to the changes.'

'Oh,' said Maggie, 'I have a long story to tell. Mrs Berry (who has been engaged for some time to a Frenchman) started with me from Paris on Thursday last, intending, she said, to go to London to see her lawyer, and have matters arranged previous to her marriage. When we landed at Dover, Monsieur de Bragance, her intended, to my surprise, met us on the pier. Mrs Berry said she was not well enough to go town, so we went to an hotel. She was out nearly all day yesterday; went out again early this morning; and when she returned, informed me she was married to Monsieur de Bragance, and as her dear husband did not like me, that she was reluctantly obliged to send me away; that she herself was about to accompany him back to the Continent, and that I had better put my things together and take the next train up to town. Then she cried a good deal, and kissed me; gave me five pounds and my travelling expenses, begged me to go and see Mr Dunsford, and tell him what a grand marriage she had made. So I packed her things and my own, took the first train I could get after—and here I am.'

'Well, I never!' sighed Mrs Grey, sitting down suddenly, as if she was unable to stand up against such tidings.

'What a mad—unprincipled—idiotic person!' said Uncle Grey, energetically, as he stirred his tea with some violence. 'Well, my dear, you are very welcome here, and we must take better care who we let you go to in future.'

'Oh!' cried Maggie, her colour returning quickly and vividly under the influence of a warm atmosphere and the concentrated attention of five pairs of eyes 'I shall not trespass on your kind-

ness and my aunt's long; for I shall be able to find something to do much more easily now.'

'My dear girl, there's nothing but changes,' began Mrs Grey, with unusual good-humour, when Dick broke in boisterously,

'Now, Maggie, you shall guess who we're expecting in to tea.'

Maggie looked round as she untied her hat, and very naturally guessed 'Tom?'

'Tom, indeed!' with derision. 'Try again; two more guesses.'

I cannot possibly guess—unless,' with a glance at her aunt's unusually benignant face, 'it is Mr—Mr—oh! the gentleman who used to come in and talk science with my uncle.'

'No, no,' chorussed Dick, Bell, and Jemima, with loud laughter.

'Don't worrit,' cried Mrs Grey. 'Maggie will be glad to get off her things and have a cup of tea. How could she ever guess? John is come back; came more than a month ago, and was going off to-morrow to have a look at Paris and see you. It is lucky after all you did come to-day.'

'John! dear cousin John come back!' cried Maggie, breathless with astonishment, and feeling a certain glow of comfort in her desolation—for it *had* been a day of utter desolation.

'That he has,' said the proud father. 'Come back, to be the stay and support of his parents and family—a prosperous man, I am happy to say, and worthy of it.'

'Yes, I must say he has behaved very handsome,' put in Mrs Grey; 'but there, Jemmy, go up with Maggie to my room and let her put off her cloak. Here, I'll make fresh tea.'

While Maggie made her simple toilet, Jemima poured forth a volume of revelations, which may be epitomised. Things had been very gloomy with the chemist and his family before John arrived, but the active colonist had exercised the magic of energy, common sense, and a judicious outlay of capital. He had seen all pa's creditors. He had rowed Tom 'awful,' and got him a berth as surgeon of a passenger ship to Australia with a captain he knew, and he was to sail to-morrow; indeed Jemima opined that Tom was downright afraid of John. She believed John was awfully rich, and he was going to buy a business for pa somewhere down in the country, where they would be quite among the gentry, but for her part she did not want to leave London. There was a young fellow, a chum of Tom's—Maggie must remember him—Fred Banks—rather wild, but so handsome and dashing, and so desperately

fond of her (Jemima), that it was hard lines having to give him up, and——

Here Mrs Grey's voice was heard calling shrilly and vociferously from the bottom of the stairs, 'Come down, can't you? Don't stay all night there chattering.'

'I can tell you John was uncommon cross when he found you were away,' said Jemima significantly, as they went down-stairs. 'Oh, they have come in; I see their hats.'

Maggie's head ached, and she felt utterly bewildered; yet through all she was conscious of an ardent curiosity to see what John was like. She remembered him with sincere affection and gratitude, and that queer half cousinly half lover-like letter she had received from him in Paris—nearly forgotten as it had been in the joys, the griefs, the excitement of the intervening time—came back to her mind with a sudden vivid flash, now that she was so completely isolated, and reduced at one blow to the original elements of her life. Perhaps John would be a friend she could love, something to help her to banish the memories she fought so hard against. These ideas darted, after the Will-o'-the-Wisp fashion of intuitive thought, through her brain, while Jemima struggled with the door handle—locks being chronically disordered in houses of Mr Grey's pattern—and then it opened. The room seemed crowded; all the party, save one, were seated round the table; Tom, with an air of having been tamed, next his mother, while on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fire-place, stood a tall, large man, with high broad shoulders and a quantity of rough dark red hair, a short thick beard of the same colour a shade or two lighter, and copious moustaches. This individual's elbows were resting on the mantelpiece, thus dragging open his waistcoat, displaying a grey flannel shirt, a light blue tie with long ends, one of which hung loose, and a white linen collar. His eyes were light and small, but quick and keen, and although every one was talking, his accents rose above all; he was exclaiming in an energetic drawl, if so contradictory a description can be accepted, 'It is a d——d shame.'

There was a sudden silence as Jemima and her companion entered. John Grey's sharp eyes fixed themselves eagerly on our heroine, who, in her turn, gazed appalled at this altered and enlarged edition of 'Cousin John.'

He was a thousand times uglier, and, to her eye, more repulsive, than her least favourable recollections depicted him! The pause,

however, was but momentary, for the next instant, pushing Jemima roughly aside, and exclaiming, 'Is this little Maggie?' 'Cousin John,' without the smallest hesitation, took her in his arms, nearly lifted her off the ground, and gave her a huge kiss!—a kiss so redolent of tobacco, and a suspicion of brandy, that Maggie's dismay was complete.

'Here's your tea, Maggie,' called Aunt Grey. 'Sit down here.'

'May I not sit by my uncle? It used always to be my seat?' asked Maggie, as she shook hands with Tom, and niched herself in between her uncle and Jemima. 'I was so surprised, so pleased, John, to hear you had come back,' she added, anxious to atone for her own guilty feelings. 'Was it a sudden thought?—you said nothing of it in the letter you wrote me last January?'

'Well it was and it wasn't. My partner wanted to establish an agency over here, so he made me come; as I was a London man, he thought I would manage better than him; and I never was so taken aback as when I found you were away, wandering about with this infernal humbug of a widow.'

Maggie looked up, startled at his language. Could this be shy silent 'Cousin John,' who hated and feared his stepmother, and now stood there as monarch of all he surveyed?

'I am sure if I had met you in Paris, Maggie, I should not have known you. You are quite a tip-topper.'

'Nor should I have known you, John, I am sure. You have grown so much, and have got quite old-looking. Has he not, uncle?'

'Yes; he is a strapping fellow,' said the father proudly. 'Take some more beef, my dear?'

'Here Dick—Bell—some of you—cut Mag some more beef;' and John seized her plate, without paying any attention to her decided refusal. 'You must be famished, and cut up into the bargain. Here, Tom, shove yourself up a little higher;' and John seated himself opposite his cousin, whom he regarded critically and with undisguised scrutiny, from the neat frill of lace which finished her black silk dress at neck and wrists, to the little white hands that were crumbling her bread in some confusion. 'Why, you look as if you had come out of a bandbox instead of a train. You might be an heiress, from your turn-out!'

'Oh,' cried Tom, 'you forget that Maggie's bargain with the widow included her old clothes; so you needn't wonder at her finery, and that amiable youth looked to Jemima for appreciation.

'Hold your tongue, you blockhead,' said his elder brother angrily.

'Quite true, Tom,' replied Maggie unmoved; 'and a very good bargain it was for me. Her left-off garments were very nice.'

'Bravo, Mag, you are a trump!' cried John, enchanted with her coolness. 'But as I was saying when you came in, it was a d——d shame to turn you adrift without due notice or nothing, and such a shabby tip as five pounds.'

'You mustn't expect every one to be as open-handed as yourself,' said Mrs Grey with transparent flattery.

'Still, I owe Mrs Berry a great deal,' said Maggie kindly. 'She has given me many advantages, and I am sure I shall find some employment as a governess or companion very soon.'

'Well we will see about that,' said Cousin John significantly.

'You must have had lots of fun,' cried Bell. 'Used you to go everywhere with Mrs Berry?'

'Not everywhere, but to a great many places, particularly in Paris. I am very sorry not to be there when you go' (civilly to John), 'for I might have been some use to you. You are going over to-morrow, are you not?'

'I am not sure about it.'

Bell and her mother exchanged glances.

'You see,' continued John, 'I have a good deal to look after. There is my own business first, before everything; then the governor here has got everything into a precious muddle—I'll be hanged if I ever saw anything like it. The missis' (a nod to his stepmother) 'is out o' sight the best man of business of the two. He is quite unfit for London; and I think I am on the scent of a good concern down in the country—proprietor dead—and widow wants to part with it. It will suit the governor to a T, if he will only sharpen up a little—and Dick will soon be a help to him. I expect they will pay me a good percentage!'

'I feel quite bewildered,' said Maggie. 'You seem to me, John, like some magician come to lift every one out of the Slough of Despond, with a sort of "Hey Presto!"'

John laughed long and loud, enchanted with this echo of his own opinion.

'You see,' he returned, 'I have been accustomed to put my shoulder to the wheel, and it's a deuced rusty wheel I couldn't turn; so I hope I shall make them keep their heads above water for the rest of their time. I am going to ship off Tom here to-morrow.'

Whereat Mrs Grey put her handkerchief to her eyes.

'And, Maggie,' asked Jemima, 'did you learn to play and sing?'

'To play, yes—not to sing.'

'Come now, do play us something, like a dear,' cried Bell. 'I would so like to hear if you really can.'

'Indeed I am so very tired I should like to go to bed,' urged Maggie, who felt completely worn out, and longing for solitude and a good cry.

'Oh, you can stay up a little while,' said Jemima. 'It is ever so long since we heard a note of music, though I do play sometimes.' So saying she opened an old-fashioned upright piano, and began to jingle a noisy galop.

'Oh, Jemima!' cried Maggie, stopping her ears. 'It is frightfully out of tune. I really couldn't touch it.'

'Set you up!' laughed Bell.

'There—there,' said Cousin John, impatiently. 'Don't bother any more; don't you see Mag is tired out? She has turned as pale as a ghost.'

'Well, get away with you, and settle Maggie's old room the best way you can for her. We will make it better to-morrow; but I have heaps to do still before I go to bed, and I cannot spare the "gurl."'

Maggie therefore said 'Good-night,' took a candle and sallied into the hall. There the sight of her large box struck her with dismay. Turning to the parlour again she said, 'I must ask some one to help me up with my box.'

'Come along, I'm your man,' said Cousin John. 'Is this it?' He seized it, heaved it on his shoulder in the most porter-like fashion, and went away rapidly aloft, Maggie following.

'Your old quarters,' he said, pausing at the door of one of the garrets. 'Yes,' returned Maggie. He pushed the door open and set down his burden. 'What a shame to put you in this desolate hole.' (He did not offer to give up his own room to her.) 'Do you remember how I found you crying here the day after my father brought you from Altringham?'

'I do—I do, indeed,' sighed Maggie, full of self-reproach; 'and how good you were to me!'

'You were always a little trump,' returned Cousin John, shaking her hand and gripping it painfully tight. 'Come, Mag, you must pay the porter,' and he stooped to kiss her again.

'Oh no, John!' cried Maggie; for this was more than she could bear. 'I hate kissing any one.'

'Don't, if you don't like, then,' said John, shortly, and tramped away down-stairs.

* * * * *

Maggie's waking next morning was a shade more cheerful than her falling to sleep. It is true her eyes felt stiff and sore from the long fit of weeeping which ensued on finding herself alone and in the dark. But 'balmy sleep' had done its usual beneficent work, and she was physically refreshed. All was as yet quiet. The light which came through her uncurtained window was faint, so she lay still and pondered over the sudden transformation scene which had been enacted yesterday. The ingredients of the dull aching pain that pervaded her whole being, as if a positive poison had been introduced into every nerve of her system, were numerous and complicated; but the largest proportion, perhaps, was due to the sense of having fallen back into bondage and dependence—to a position which seemed to cut her off from all that made life worth having. The place she held with Mrs Berry was certainly humble enough; still, she had grown to be of importance to her patroness, and feeling this, she felt at home. Mrs Berry was commonplace, ignorant, ill-bred, but she had been kind to Maggie, and, still more, dependent on her; and oh! what glimpses of delight did she not owe to that foolish deluded woman!

In the dim dawn of that foggy morning, through the duskiness of that sordid, miserable garret, the light and glitter and perfume of 'the ball,' the culminating glory of her life, came back with all the fairy loveliness which memory lends to her revivals of joy.

This and the like of it had passed away for ever! Never again would such a voice as Trafford's hold pleasant converse with her, or ask her for a waltz with that veiled earnestness she understood so well; and the waltz itself, and that startling but delightful dinner and ramble in the Bois de Boulogne! Oh, she must not think of it. She wished she had not gone. What madness and folly to remember all this! Even alone, in the faint dawn, she blushed for herself. It was so shameful to be thus fascinated by a man who, beyond all doubt, considered her beneath him socially, even if she were not too ill-educated and insignificant to attract him personally. And yet, come what might, he *did* like to be with her and to talk to her; he took some special interest in her, and at any rate spared her all foolish compliments or insolent love-making. Yet what

could hold Geoffrey Trafford back from doing as he liked? He could have only thought of her as a pleasant, good little girl; something higher than a housemaid. 'While I allow this man to fill up my heart—no, not my heart, my fancy,' she said indignantly to herself. 'What a shame! I will put him away and trample out such weakness. I have my own life to live, independent of him. Why should I let a shadow spoil it? And I am sure it does not promise to have so much brightness that I can afford to be unnecessarily miserable. Oh, how I wish I could fall in love with Cousin John!—I would try hard, if he were anything like what I expected—that would cure me. But he is so—so very dreadful!

At this point of her reflections the voice of Mrs Grey was heard, as if from her chamber, shouting shrill instructions to 'the gurl;' and distant slamming of doors echoed from below.

'I must get up,' said Maggie to herself. 'I suppose they will breakfast early because Tom is going away.' The interval of dressing was also busily employed, but by more practical cogitations. First, there was poor Mrs Berry, now La Comtesse de Bragance. Maggie could have cried to think of her alone, and in the power of that sneering French devil. Yes, she must make her way to see Mr Dunsford, and ascertain if anything could be done to help her, for the time would soon come when she would want help; and then it would surely not be selfish in her to mention her own wants, for Mrs Berry told her in her hurry yesterday that he would give her a character, and she must lose no time in endeavouring to find employment. She was quite sure her aunt did not want to take her away into the country, and London was the place for such a quest as hers.

When Maggie came down, Mrs Grey and 'the gurl' were the only members of the family afloat. Her aunt's curls were not yet released from their nocturnal prison of papers; a dingy dressing-gown, a knitted woollen 'crossover' tied behind, a face that had evidently bent over the smoky beginnings of the kitchen fire, and was further blurred by occasional tear-drops, removed with the back of the hand or the ever-ready and grimy duster—this sounds like a very unattractive exterior. Yet never had Aunt Grey seemed so lovely to Maggie before. Her hard features had softened into a wistful expression, her keen eyes were dimmed with natural moisture, for her precious boy—the one bloom, the one tenderness, of her rugged character—was about to leave her and plunge into the darkness of an unknown world.

'Maggie, would you mind dusting the parlour and putting it straight? You see' (with a pathetic snuffle) 'poor Tom wants his breakfast early to go to the Docks, and John will expect everything in order, though it was the middle of the night.'

In deep amazement at her aunt's change of tone towards her stepson, Maggie exclaimed with alacrity, 'Yes, to be sure I will. Give me the duster; and don't fret about Tom, aunt, though of course it is very hard to part with him. Think what a good opening this situation is for him.'

'Opening, indeed!' returned Mrs Grey in a mysterious tone of dissatisfaction. 'He is that clever that he'd soon have made an opening *here* if he had had a chance; but never mind—you go up-stairs, my dear.'

So Maggie went, and soon imparted a new aspect to the room, which looked quite revived, when the 'gurl' came slowly in, with an alarming jingle — a heavily-laden tray in her outstretched hands, and the table-cloth in a tight roll under her arm.

'If you leave those things I will lay the breakfast-table,' said Maggie briskly, she was so thankful to be busy.

'I'm sure, 'm, I am ever so much obliged to you,' said 'slavey, and vanished.

The process of 'laying the cloth' was not quite completed when a heavy shuffling was heard in the passage, and then John's voice shouted down the kitchen stairs, 'I say, why the deuce haven't you brought my boots up? I left them in the hall last night on purpose to remind you; but you have no more head than'—— (unintelligible grumble), and enter John, without a collar, in a pair of highly objectionable leather slippers, rubbed a dirty white, through one of which the brown toe of a woollen sock was distinctly visible.

'Maggie!' he cried, not abashed—that did not seem possible—but a little put out. 'Why, I thought we should not see you these hours. You looked so dead-beat last night, I thought you'd want twenty-four hours' sleep at least. Come, let's have a look at you. You don't seem as if you had had rest enough yet.'

'Oh, I am all right this morning,' she returned, extricating her hand from his grasp.

'And are you doing that d——d stupid girl's work here? By Jove, it is too bad!'

'Why?' asked Maggie, still busying herself about the table

'You know I am no stranger here; and it would ill become me to sit idle in Uncle Grey's house.'

'You are a regular little brick; you always were,' continued John, taking up a position on the hearth-rug, whence he gazed admiringly on his cousin, wondering dimly what it was that made her such a dainty creature, different from all other women he had ever met.

'And you are glad to see Cousin John once more?'

'Indeed I am,' replied Maggie, hastily furbishing up her gratitude to stimulate her cordiality. 'I should be very good for nothing if I were not.'

'Did you get the letter I wrote to you—let me see—last January?'

'Yes, I did,' returned Maggie, smiling, as she remembered that famous epistle, and sighing to think of how and why her ideas had developed so largely since. 'I got it in Paris.'

'And why didn't you write?'

'I did. I did, indeed; but not immediately.'

'Hum! More interesting employment—or amusement?'

'Employment, plenty. Mrs Berry did not let me eat the bread of idleness, though she was very good.'

'At any rate, you've not learned to be a fine lady. It does one's heart good to see you bustling about.'

'Yes,' said Maggie, irresistibly impelled to put him down. 'I have so far learned to be fine, that I don't like to see gentlemen—especially young gentlemen—in their slippers, and without their collars, in the morning.'

'Why, that's a downer for me! Well, Mag, I wish you would make that lazy, ill-conditioned, stupid girl bring me my boots.'

'Poor thing, why abuse her? Think of all she has to do. No, Cousin John, kind old friend as you are, I will *not* look after *your* boots, though I will gladly lay my uncle's breakfast-table. Go, get them yourself, and then dress, like a good boy.'

She spoke with a pleasant smile and pretty little nod. But John did not like it. His over-weening estimate of himself was 'roughed' by her remarks, and he went sulkily out of the room. At the door he stumbled over the desired boots, and went moodily away to 'dress,' as his cousin—his intended *protégée*—little Mag, who was to be lifted out of her Cinderella condition by the might of his will, had told him.

The family now came dropping in. Tom last—or last but one, if we count the reappearance of John in a slightly improved toilet; and

the conversation became general, if the universal clatter, in which no one listened to the other, can be so dignified. Tom, whose spirits were wild from the sense of being out of debt and danger, little heeded his mother's tears. The prospect of new scenes and amusements left little room for regret. Dick was unfeignedly pleased at the departure of his brother. Jemima slightly regretted it: it looked like separation from the fascinating Fred Banks. The father, wrapped up in his eldest son, was indifferent.

'Well, John,' asked the head of the house, 'will you go over to Paris to-night?'

'I am not quite sure. I'll see Tom off, and then make up my mind.'

'I thought you were quite determined?' said Mrs Grey.

'You were wrong, then.'

'Is it not unusual for a ship to start on Sunday?' asked Maggie.

'Not at all,' replied Cousin John. 'Sailors like it; and, Tom, we had better be off soon—she'll be out of dock, I'm thinking, early.'

'Dear, dear,' said the mother; 'don't they wait for passengers at Gravesend? Mightn't Tom go down to-morrow?'

'If you choose to stand his rail-fare, and mine, there and back; for remember, I'll see him on board; and it will take the change out of a couple of sovereigns.'

John spoke in what seemed to Maggie—fresh from intercourse with Trafford, and even De Bragance, whose insolence was always polished—a savage tone.

'If his mother wishes to keep him with her another day'—— began the kind old chemist.

'D—— it, governor,' interrupted John, roughly. 'You had better recollect whether you have any money to spare, or any you can call your own.'

Maggie instinctively drew nearer to her uncle, as if to protect him, and looked in his face to see how he bore such insolence. It pained her to see the distressed guilty look that stole over his gentle worn countenance; and she could not keep her eyes from flashing a glance of angry remonstrance straight into her cousin's, as he sat opposite. John sat on for a while, unmoved by looks or silence—for the sublime disapprobation of the general benefactor had rather an intimidating effect on the company. And then, with a kindly smile in his eyes—and Maggie admitted to herself that he had a pleasant honest smile—exclaimed disrespectfully but genially,

'Never mind, old boy. You are going to make a lot of tin, you know, in the new business, and pay me cent per cent.'

Mr Grey smiled a somewhat sickly smile; and Maggie saw how hard it is to skin over the wounds which hasty words inflict.

'Oh! we had better be off.' cried Tom. Where's the use of waiting?'

'Better bear the wrench at once, aunt,' said Maggie kindly; 'it would be just as bad to-morrow. You see he is quite happy, naturally, to go away into the world.'

And then every one rose—and for twenty minutes or so confusion dire reigned throughout the entire establishment. Parcels left at the top of the house were remembered spasmodically. Boxes were fastened and then reopened, to receive some article of the last necessity. Dick was eagerly despatched for a cab, and then frantically recalled—and Maggie thought of the similar *bouleversement* which distinguished her own and Mrs Berry's departure more than two years before.

At last the three young men departed. Mrs Grey retired downstairs, and quiet was once more restored.

It was not quite so dreadful that Sunday as Maggie anticipated. John did not return till tea-time; and after the early dinner Mrs Grey went up to her room. The young ladies went out to walk, and Maggie had a long confidential talk with her uncle.

The evening was well disposed of by going to hear a popular preacher, and Maggie, after her long absence from England, enjoyed the service in a genuine English church.

'I must make my way to the City to-morrow,' said Maggie, after supper, addressing her aunt, 'I want to see Mr Dunsford, Mrs Berry's solicitor, and I do not like to go quite alone; will you allow Bell or Jemima to come with me?'

'*I* will go with you. I am the proper person to go,' said Cousin John, resolutely. He had not escorted the young ladies to church, preferring avowedly to stay at home and smoke.

'Thank you,' returned Maggie, seeing there was no escape. 'If you can spare time; but you are so busy.'

'I shall manage it,' said John.

* * * * *

Monday was a dark day with a drizzling rain, just enough to make the streets slippery and unpleasant. And Maggie, with a sinking heart, prepared to accompany Cousin John to Mr Dunsford's office. She could not help fancying that highly respectable man of

ousness would somehow hold her responsible for Mrs Berry's matrimonial follies; on two or three occasions he had written to her on Mrs Berry's affairs, and always conveyed the idea that he looked to her as a sort of brains-carrier. On the whole, she was rather glad Cousin John had offered to go with her, for whatever his faults, he would let no mortal man browbeat him, or anything belonging to him, she felt sure. Her gladness, however, was a little damped when, after an elaborate toilet, John sallied forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber, and certainly, on that day, rejoicing to run his course. His trousers of a large check pattern in light and dark shades of brown, conveyed the painful impression of being conspicuously patched on the knees; moreover, a broad brown stripe down the outsides further distinguished them. A brown and blue speckly waistcoat, well opened, to show a reckless display of white shirt-front, a light blue satin tie with long ends drawn through a massive gold ring, and a bran new dark blue frock coat, which hung straight down from his shoulders, innocent of any sartorial art to make it fit the bend of the back, completed his costume.

He was in the act of removing the silver paper from a glossy hat when Maggie came in.

'Well,' said John, looking at her admiringly; 'I hope I am got up smart enough to please you? You must not think I have no clothes to wear.'

'Oh no! I am sure you are very smart indeed,' cried Maggie, a little touched by his simple vanity, and despairing of any reformation in his taste.

'That's right,' he returned, evidently pleased at her verdict. 'And now come along; if it was not for your black dress, we might be taken for a bride and bridegroom.'

So saying he marched off, leaving her to follow.

The streets being rather slippery, Cousin John insisted on piloting his cousin from the corner where the 'busses passed to the step of one of those vehicles, by grasping her upper arm tightly in his large strong hand, till the tender flesh and veins felt crushed and sore.

'You hurt me, pray let go my arm,' she urged, and the next moment found herself nearly lifted into the 'bus. It was with a sensation almost of thankfulness that she observed John compelled to sit at the door while she found a place at the other end.

It was a long journey, however, and before it was more than

half accomplished, the shifting company had changed frequently, and enabled Cousin John to place himself next his fair *protégée*.

'I say, what a delicate concern you are, Maggie! You can't bear to be touched. I hope you haven't turned cantankerous—you didn't use to be.'

'Indeed I am not,' smiling pleasantly; 'but you really did hurt me; you don't know how hard you hold.'

'Do I?' said John, with a complaisant laugh—like all men of his stamp, he was quite proud of his strength. 'I must remember you are a tender article in future.'

Maggie shook her head, in token of declining conversation at the pitch required in an omnibus, and John found a congenial spirit in an opposite neighbour, a stout man, regardless of his 'h's, with whom he shouted a profound discussion on the increase of the bank rate and its probable effect upon railway stock.

On arriving at Mr Dunsford's office they found that gentleman had not yet come in, and a weary interval of waiting ensued.

John fretted at being kept, yet would not hear of leaving Maggie; he walked about the room, and read the prospectuses of insurance and other companies, which hung framed and glazed upon the wall; he drummed upon the window, and looked at his watch. 'What hours for a fellow to keep! He can be no great man of business, not to be at his office by eleven. I have fifty places to go to, and I'll be late for them all.'

'Then pray leave me here! do not wait,' said Maggie, who felt painfully nervous at the idea of the coming interview, and was still more unnerved by John's impatience.

'No, I shall not leave you to be humbugged and bullied by this lawyer fellow. Why, you are as pale as a ghost at the idea of it! What a little coward you are,' sitting down beside her, 'and yet you have a sort of pluck, too.'

'A very curious sort, I am afraid. Still, I am not quite a coward.'

'Mr Dunsford will see you now,' said a clerk, looking into the dingy room in which they were incarcerated.

John Grey jumped up and led the way, and Maggie came trembling after.

Deep and dire was Mr Dunsford's anger when Maggie, with no small difficulty, managed to inform him of poor Mrs Berry's fatal marriage. Though a cool self-contained man of business, he could not refrain from muttering the word 'idiot,' under his breath.

'And when did this precious marriage take place?'

'On Saturday,' said Maggie, almost tearful at the magnitude of the misfortune; while Cousin John, who had not removed his hat, stood with his hands in his pockets, looking out sharply for an opportunity of interfering, and watching Maggie's distressed face.

'And pray why didn't you write and let me know what was going on, Miss Grey? From all I have known of you—your letters, and the way you kept Mrs Berry's accounts—I really thought you a very sensible conscientious person. You ought to have let me know.'

'But, Mr Dunsford, I could not possibly interfere. I begged and implored of Mrs Berry not to commit herself too far until she had consulted you, and she promised me faithfully she would not. We were coming to London to see you and have everything properly settled, when we met the Count at Dover, and the next morning she went out with him; I had not the most remote idea she was gone to be married; but I begin to think now they must have settled it all before the Count left Paris.'

'Highly probable,' said the lawyer, drily.

'The young lady is a trifle green, Sir,' put in John.

Mr Dunsford looked at him over his spectacles, but made no reply.

'I am surprised Mrs Berry has not written to you,' said Maggie.

'She waited to let you break the news. Where is she and her precious Count to be found?'

'I have not an idea. She said she was going back to the Continent with her husband, and that she would write to me.'

'She is sure to write to me,' rejoined Mr Dunsford, 'as all her property is in my hands, and Monsieur will want to finger some of it before long. However, when she gives me a chance to tell her so, I will wash my hands of her. I had a great respect for poor Mr Berry (who always seemed a sensible man till he met her), and I promised him to take care of her as far as I could; but now I shall certainly wash my hands of her.'

'Oh! pray do not say that, Mr Dunsford!' cried Maggie, imploringly. 'She will want your help sorely yet. Monsieur de Bragance will spend her money, and ill-treat her, and leave her to die or starve—if he cannot kill her safely. You must for her sake try and keep back a little of her money. After all she is only silly—not wicked.'

'Wickedness is seldom so severely punished as folly,' said the

lawyer, coolly; 'and I must say I hoped greatly that you would have helped to keep her straight.'

'I tried all I could,' returned Maggie, unconsciously clasping her hands; 'but, you see, I was too insignificant to have much influence, though she was very, very kind to me.'

'And how the deuce,' exclaimed John, 'could you expect a widow with well-lined pockets to mind such a chit as this?'

'Perhaps not—perhaps not,' said Mr Dunsford, looking kindly at Maggie. 'But from all I can gather, I believe you were a very pleasant and useful companion; and I hope my very foolish client did not fail to acknowledge your services properly.'

'Ay! to the extent of a "fi-pund" note and her blessing,' put in John; 'though she was sent adrift in the middle of a quarter, weren't you, Mag?'

'Oh, John! Mrs Berry and I were on those terms'——

'She had a right to cheat you, I suppose,' interrupted John. 'I leave it to you, Sir, if this was fair.'

'Not handsome treatment, by any means, and I am afraid I can do you no good.'

'Thank you,' said Maggie hesitating; 'I think perhaps you could; for as I must endeavour to find some other employment, and I cannot apply to Mrs Berry until I know where to find her, perhaps you wouldn't mind—that is—you would be so good as to let me refer to you? You might say that I lived with Mrs Berry, and that she was satisfied, and all that.'

'I have no objection to do so. I shall be very happy also to mention you to my daughter, who might possibly hear of something to suit you.'

'You are very good,' replied Maggie gratefully; adding in a timid voice, as if half afraid to obtrude her poor little affairs upon so great a man, 'Would you advise me to put an advertisement in the *Times?*'

'This young lady is so desperate independent she can't bear to stay even for a week or two with her own uncle,' said John facetiously, adding, with an air of insufferable patronage, 'If she would only wait a bit, I think I know a place that would suit her exactly.'

'Every one knows their own wants and wishes best,' returned Mr Dunsford, rising. 'I dare say an advertisement might bring you some chance, but I would not advise your putting it in until the end of August, when people are returning to town. Meantime

I will mention you to my daughter, and a—— leave me your address.'

Maggie had written it on a card and gave it to him.

'Ah! Beverly Street,' he said; 'the same place where Mrs Berry found you—very well. I shall not forget, good morning.'

'Now, John, I can release you, and I am sure I am so much obliged to you,' said Maggie, as they found themselves in the street, a narrow little dusky street near Doctors Commons.

'Never mind, you'll want something to eat, so come along; we'll look for a cake shop, or a luncheon bar, or something.'

'Oh no! thank you. I couldn't eat anything; just show me where I shall find an omnibus, that's all I want.'

'But I say you *must* have something! It will be all hours when you get back, and I'd like to see the missus order up anything for *you* after dinner's gone. No, no, Mag! you shan't starve while you are with me; besides, I want to eat myself.'

He was still kind and considerate for her, while she, ingrate that she was, could not keep out of her memory and her heart another voice—oh! how different in tone and accent!—a voice so soft, so varied in modulation, with a ring of power in it; and which had addressed almost the same words to her scarce four weeks ago! But she felt she was in Cousin John's hands, she must do what seemed good in his eyes. So they went into a huge cake shop at the top of Ludgate Hill, with a dusty floor strewn with flakes of pastry and fragments of buns, where at a grimy little marble table, all stained with rings of porter and drops of sherbet, she strove diligently to consume a veal-and-ham pie. While John, with much satisfaction, devoured two, and washed them down with a glass of brandy-and-water.

'I don't feel at all inclined to let you go,' said John, as he came out of the cake shop triumphant. 'What a pity we didn't tell them not to expect us back, we might have dined somewhere and gone to the theatre.'

'I do not think that would quite do, John!'

'Why not?—not proper? Why you and I are like brother and sister, ain't we, Mag?'

'Oh yes, indeed,' cried Maggie, delighted to accept the relationship. 'I am sure no brother could be kinder and truer than you are, dear John.'

'Well, as you must go, here's a 'bus—take care of yourself—good-bye,' and with a squeeze of the hand that left Maggie's tingling, John turned and was lost in the crowd.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE weeks which ensued, while Maggie waited for the season prescribed by Mr Dunsford as most suited for her advertisement, were about the most unpleasant, though not the saddest, of her young and troubled life. Nothing of after years ever equalled the agony and desolation which fell upon her when her mother died. Nor did any bitterness enter her soul so deeply as the insults and tyrannies she sustained from her aunt; but this early autumn of her third year's emancipation was tormented by a perpetual struggle in heart and mind—a constant maintaining of the lines within which reason, sorely beset by the overwhelming forces of imagination, memory, taste, and tenderness, had entrenched herself—and, indeed, it pleases me to think how gallantly and true to her higher instincts my modest little heroine carried herself all through the silent strife, without one word of sympathy or help. Nothing but the honest woman-pride to keep her from sinking into despondency, sentimentalism, or bad health! Simply the instinctive consciousness that she must not, in a matter such as this, give more than she received. And although it may militate against her character as a heroine, and prove her too reasonable to be interesting, I must be veracious, and, moreover, avow my conviction that such a struggle is certain of success, and brings after it strength and peace. Maggie began to experience this before many months were over; but I must not anticipate, and only set this down for the encouragement of young ladies whose affections have wandered to objects who do not want them. The sweetest, the most modest girl, may find herself on the verge of, or in, such a predicament; but to a true womanly woman such a wound carries its own cure.

One thing comforted Maggie: it was John's assurance, as they finished those veal-and-ham pies, that they were to be like brother and sister. She smiled at her own conceit as she remembered the horror and alarm with which she received his first advances to a renewal of their old and familiar acquaintance. 'I must not be so silly as to imagine every one who is kind must be in love with me,' she said to herself; 'I am sure I can be very fond of John if he will be just like a brother.' But even as a brother she could not

feel towards him as she wished to do. He was so rough and untidy; he used the authority which success and experience had given so ruthlessly—albeit for the general good; he was so unsparing of his father's weakness, of his sisters' follies, and far, far too sympathetic with Mrs Grey, in her business-like hardness—though he frequently administered a moral squeeze to her also, just to show her she must not presume. Then the terribly ugly aspect of the house was another unconfessed worry to Maggie, who loved prettiness and neatness. With Mrs Berry all minor matters were in her own hands, and their rooms were always gracefully arranged and scrupulously clean.

However, John's intense energy left no one too much time to think. He was always at work himself, and making others work. 'Here, Mag!' he cried one morning, a few weeks after their visit to Mr Dunsford's office; 'I wish you and Bell—all of you—would set to work and make an inventory of every stick in the house. Begin right away at the top, and call those rat-holes attics, d'ye mind?'

'What in the world do you want that for, John?' asked Bell, as discontentedly as she dared.

'I want it done, and that ought to be enough for you,' returned John, helping himself a second time to the bacon and poached eggs, served especially for him, and which he failed not to appropriate. 'But, Mag, you know, if we arrange about this business for the governor at Ditton Market, we'll have an auction of everything here, and an inventory all ready will be a save and a gain both; so see about it, like a good girl.'

'I will,' said Maggie, readily.

'And do you really think you will be able to manage this matter?' asked Mr Grey.

'Yes, I will; the more I inquire into it the better it seems. But mark you, I'll have to borrow some of the money, so you must make it pay, by jingo! or I'll be coming back to know the reason why—there, Dick, there's a bit of bacon I can't manage.'

Dick was not proud—and accepted it.

'And I say, governor, you and I had better run down look at the place; it will be the right thing, and rouse you up a bit. I expect the country will freshen you wonderful.'

'Indeed, I was always partial to the country, John, and your conduct gives me new life and energy.'

'I hope so,' returned the son; 'I am sure you want both.'

'If you had found them a little sooner,' grumbled Mrs Grey, 'we might have had a flourishing business here, and there's no place like London, after all.'

'Oh, stop that!' cried John, rising. 'Nagging never raised a man's spirit yet. I wish I could find a straightforward, pushing young man with a trifle of ready rhino, for a partner in the concern. Dick here isn't old enough to be of much use.'

'How do you know?' said Dick. 'I can roll pills like anything.'

'We'll have my father up for manslaughter, if you go rolling your pills down people's throats,' returned the family benefactor.

'Then you are not going to Paris?'

'I have other fish to fry—other employment for my capital,' said John; 'besides'—as he left the room—'it was Maggie, here, I wanted to see, and she has saved me the journey. Now, gals, don't you forget the inventory!'

True to his intention, John carried his father away to the new Eldorado a few days after.

'Much good *he* will do there,' grumbled Mrs Grey to her daughters. 'Now, if I had gone, there would have been some sense in it. I could see with half an eye whether the place would answer or not; but of course John knows best!'

The eagle eye of John being removed, the Demoiselles Grey left the task of the inventory to Maggie's unassisted efforts. She accordingly progressed all the better; while her cousins divided their time between making up smart autumn garments, and exhibiting the same in the park and elsewhere.

The captivating Fred Banks, too, appeared, to comfort Mrs Grey with sympathy—anent the absent Tom—and consoling prophecies respecting the certainty of his coming out first-rate—'a regular top-sawyer,' or, as Dick rudely paraphrased it, 'a top sawbones.'

Jemima was consequently in a state of beatitude, and both young ladies, who had always been tolerant of their cousin, now regarded her with positive liking, so kindly and useful did they find her in lending patterns, in cutting out and fitting in. And then Mrs Grey had been tempted to have the old piano tuned, because Maggie promised to help Bell with her practising. So when Uncle Grey and John returned, which they did in a state of much contentment, Maggie was able to relieve the tedium of the evening by singing and playing simple melodies, which delighted the chemist's soul, and even had charms to soothe John's savage breast.

Thus Maggie multiplied occupation to herself, and the weeks flew over; still Mrs Berry made no sign.

By her aunt's advice, Maggie went nearly every morning to a neighbouring news-agent, where she read the advertisement sheet of the *Times* diligently, and even answered two or three, but with no result; the only answer she received being from a pious lady, who wished to give a happy home to some evangelical young person, who would in return undertake the education of nine young souls, ranging from twelve to three years of age.

John growled and laughed at this—while he rather annoyed Maggie the same evening by suddenly kissing her when saying good-night. Even had she time she would hardly have liked to refuse. Yet it was singularly unpleasant to her; so much so that she took herself to task for over-fastidiousness, ingratitude, and a dozen other errors of nature, before she could dismiss it from her mind.

However, there was not now much time for thought, for having completed all his arrangements with the fast son and heir of the late chemist at Ditton Market, who longed to finger the cash for the excellent bargain he was bestowing on the incoming tenant, John, to use his own expression, turned all hands to clear the decks. The inventory was found complete. Mother and the girls were set to pack up their belongings; and John himself, with Maggie's help, set diligently to work to make up the 'governor's' books, and gather together what he could of the small amounts due.

Then the auction was organised—confusion and discomfort had almost reached their culminating point; poor Maggie—nervous at the idea of leaving London and the chances of employment behind her, yet shrunk from intruding her affairs on any one in such a supreme moment, especially as she had no plan to offer—was therefore infinitely relieved when one evening, after cogitating in his father's arm-chair for some time in silence, John suddenly spake.

'I have been thinking it won't do for you all to leave this on Wednesday. I can't see after everything when the auction is over; and I'll be deuced uncomfortable in a lodging all by myself. I tell you what you'll do'—to his stepmother; 'leave Mag and Bell behind! Mag's a capital clerk—first-rate, and no mistake—and Bell—well, we'll make some use of her—at any rate, one room will do for the two gals, and it will be the same cost.'

'Oh, John,' put in Jemima, 'can't you let *me* stay?'

'No' I won't, miss,' replied her brother; 'you are no use at all!

But that's the plan, ma'am.' No question asked as to the inclinations of the individuals destined to carry out Cousin John's immutable decrees.

'I shall be glad to stay, on account of putting in my advertisement,' said Maggie; 'and I shall also be glad to be of any use.'

'Use! Why you are the most useful little brick I ever met, said John, enthusiastically. 'I say, governor, she would give her skin for you; though I don't think she cares much for any of the rest of us. Now then, gals, you start to-morrow morning and find a lodging for us—nice tidy rooms, five and twenty shillings a week, not a rap more. And if you look sharp and keep me right down comfortable, I'll be whipt if I don't take you to the theatre now and then—but you must earn it!'

'Agreed,' said Maggie, laughing. 'We will be diligent, and you must be reasonable.'

'So I am—always reasonable, you monkey!' retorted John, pinching her ear with a familiarity she could not resent. And with a huge yawn he marched away to bed.

It was altogether like a hurried dream—Uncle and Aunt Grey being uprooted and transplanted; Maggie could scarcely imagine London without them. However, the dream was fulfilled, and one fine morning, about two months after her parting from Mrs Berry, she found herself in charge of Cousin John's luggage, her own, and Bell, in a tolerably neat lodging in one of the small streets that lead from the Edgware Road. It will, probably, further militate against our little heroine's character, as a heroine, if it is stated that she rather enjoyed being mistress and manager. She was too thorough a woman not to enjoy household work. To obtain the nicest and freshest goods at the most moderate price—to bestow a look of comfort and prettiness on the rooms which her little party occupied—to save some trifle in essentials to expend on ornament, these were her ambitions; and although Bell considered her a fidget, and John was only half alive to the results of her exertions, the success was its own reward.

'I wish,' she thought, 'I might be housekeeper to John. I might civilise him a little, and be tolerably useful; but, of course, it would not be proper.'

For habit works wonders, and though John was still very dreadful in many ways, the keenness of her first impression had worn off; especially as she felt that, however familiar, even to disrespect, he might be, her opinions always had a certain weight with him.

What most revolted her was his irrepressible purse-pride—his obtrusive consciousness of success. Still she was very thankful he had kept her in London, and as soon as the business connected with the auction was over she would write her advertisement and set to work for herself.

The first day at her disposal, she set forth to ascertain from Mr Dunsford if he had heard from Mrs Berry, as she had firmly believed that lady would have written to her before this; and she feared her poor friend's evil days had begun, even sooner than she had anticipated.

On this occasion, however, Maggie determined to dispense with Cousin John's escort, and therefore permitted him to depart without mentioning her intentions. Breakfast had been to his liking, and he lit the short pipe he persisted in smoking, in great good humour.

'Now, girls, I must say I think you have done capital, so far, and not asked for much money either. Have tea half an hour earlier, and I'll take you to the Princess's. We can walk there and back too; and I say, Bell, you are in great luck, for I dare say you've done precious little towards the general good.'

'Yes, indeed she has,' cried Maggie, vexed that John should mortify his sister. 'Our work and success is a joint-stock concern, only, we hope, *un*limited.'

'You are a brick, Maggie! I always said so, and now I wouldn't mind giving you a kiss in token of my brotherly approbation.'

'No, thank you. Not when you are smoking, certainly'—in a displeased tone.

'Of all the stand-off little devils I ever met, Mag, you are the stand-offest! Here, Bell! brush my hat, will you?'

As Maggie communed with herself—for this can be accomplished amid the rattle of an omnibus as well as in the stillness of one's own chamber—she felt how ardently she longed to escape from her present surroundings. 'If,' she thought, 'I could find some nice old lady in delicate health, who would grow fond of me, and confide her early griefs and trials to me, how delightful it would be! Or two or three sweet little girls, somewhere in the country, with a charming sensible mamma!' so ran her reveries; for with all her practicality in action, Maggie was an imaginative romantic little goose in many ways; and the prospect of having some one to lavish affection upon was too delightful to be put out of sight altogether. 'I wonder,' began her brain afresh, 'if Mr Trafford remembered

to mention me to Lady Torchester. I think he would remember a promise; but I am glad she never wrote; I do not want to have anything more to do with great people. Yet, oh! how glad I should be to see Lord Torchester! What a nice, honest, kind creature he was! How could I have ever thought him like Cousin John? He was so modest and simple. What *would* John be were he as great a personage as Lord Torchester? But then everything would be different. How rough and presumptuous *he* is! Had I been a princess, Mr Trafford could not have been more deferential to me; but he is unlike every one else, and I must not think of him.'

'Lady for St Paul's Churchyard,' said the conductor, and Maggie got out.

Mr Dunsford was in, and received her at once this time. He had heard from Mrs Berry, or Madame de Bragance, and a very unsatisfactory letter she had written. She stiffly announced her marriage, and directed Mr Dunsford to sell out a thousand pounds India Railway Stock, as M. de Bragance had a better investment for it; and moreover, ordered that all stocks standing in her name should be changed into that of De Bragance. She had written from Florence, and on Mr Dunsford writing to remonstrate with her, she had replied by a sharp and decided dismissal. She further directed that his account should be sent in, and all her papers, &c., handed over to another solicitor, named in her letter, &c. Mr Dunsford was even now engaged in the operation, and so cross under the infliction, that poor Maggie dared not fulfil her intention of asking him if it was now time to advertise; so she soon retreated, much mortified to find that Madame de Bragance had not even mentioned her name.

As she walked along, sad enough, she was startled by a strong grasp laid upon her shoulder; turning, she looked into Cousin John's eyes.

'Why, what the deuce are you scheming after, Madame Mag?' cried he, drawing her hand through his arm and squeezing it close to his side. 'You never told me a word of your intending to visit the City. Where have you been?'

'To Mr Dunsford's,' returned Maggie, considerably annoyed at this encounter. 'I did not tell you, because I knew it would only waste your time to come with me.'

'Look here,' said John. 'I have cleared off my morning's work, and I'll just go straight back with you. We'll take a Piccadilly

bus, get out at Hyde Park Corner, and have a walk in the Park. We'll be as jolly as sand-boys; come along;' and John's face, so far as it was visible through the red hair that encumbered it, shone with glee.

It was a clear bright day, crisp with the first faint frostiness that sometimes tinges the days of September, and yet, though considerably liable to skyey influences, Maggie could not raise her spirits. The feeling of her own helplessness and isolation pressed heavily upon her, and John's jovial patronage and cousinly familiarity humiliated her unreasonably.

The Park was empty, of course; a rare equestrian or two dotted the Row, and decided John as to the direction they should take.

'Come along, Mag, we will have a look at the horses. I used to stick on pretty well myself at the Cape, and I know a good horse when I see one, I can tell you. I took to riding quite natural. Do you think you would have pluck enough to mount a horse, Maggie?'

'Yes, of course I should, if it was quiet,' said Maggie, her thoughts flying back to the last proposition respecting horse exercise that had been made to her.

John talked on of his own exploits, and how he had ridden to this station and the other kraal. He laughed at some of the stout old 'buffers' who were pounding along for exercise conscientiously on powerful cobs, bearing strong resemblance to their riders. At last, he exclaimed, 'There, that fellow sticks on capital.'

The man he remarked had already caught Maggie's attention. He was mounted on a large handsome chestnut, which appeared possessed of the bad temper with which chestnuts are generally credited. But the fiery animal had met his master. In vain he plunged, and reared, and bolted, his rider sat unmoved; and finally horse and horseman disappeared at a gallop.

Although the rider's back had been to them, there was something familiar to Maggie's eye in his figure and carriage, nay, even in the back of his hat; for, let sceptics scoff if they will, there *is* individuality even in the back of a man's hat.

'I fancy he has learnt to ride in some of the colonies,' said John.

'I am sure he has not,' returned Maggie, somewhat aggressively.

'Why, I would like to know?'

'Oh, I cannot tell; only he is so well dressed, and looks like a gentleman.'

'Do you know, Mag, though you keep it to yourself, I begin to

think you are a conceited monkey? Why shouldn't gentlemen go to the colonies—and come out of them too?'

'Of course they may. I know nothing about it.'

'What has vexed you? I think you are a trifle cantankerous.'

I don't intend to be so. Perhaps I am a little put out, because Mrs Berry never mentioned me in her letter, not once; and it *is* sad to be forgotten.'

'Pooh!' replied John. 'Don't you fret about that old cat; there are better people left to care for you. Where is she?'

Maggie told him all she had learned from Mr Dunsford, as they strolled slowly along; and John made uncomplimentary comments, and Maggie still felt and seemed dull.

'Come,' said John, at last, 'you are in the dolefuls; here, take my arm, and we'll cut away home, for you have made those lodgings uncommon like home. You take my arm—you must,' and Maggie's reluctant little hand was drawn through his arm once more. 'It's rather cool here; you can't think how delightful it is just now at the Cape, mild, and bright, and—stop! here is the chestnut again—quiet enough now.'

It *was* the chestnut, pacing soberly along, and followed by a smart groom on a brown horse, older and graver than that which bore his master. As the chestnut approached, his rider guided him across to where the cousins stood. Maggie felt for an instant as if giddy and in the dark, as she recognised Geoffrey Trafford. He dismounted quickly and threw the rein to his servant, then raising his hat, stood before her and took the hand she hesitatingly held out.

'I had no idea you were in town, Miss Grey,' said the dear, well-known voice, so clear, refined, and yet commanding, with its indescribable, high-bred ring. 'When did you arrive?'

'Oh! about two months ago,' said Maggie, gathering up her forces and making a grand successful effort for composure and self-control. 'Mrs Berry left Paris about ten days after you did.'

'Indeed, and are you still with her?'

'No,' a smile and shake of the head, 'she is married.'

'To that card-playing fellow, De Bragance?'

'Yes.'

'Ah! poor woman, what a finale! And where are you?' looking keenly into her soft eyes, his own softening as he looked.

'I am with my uncle, that is, with my cousins.'

'Ah!' a sharp inquisitive glance at her companion.

'This is my Cousin John, of whom you have heard me speak,' said Maggie observing it, and colouring vividly, though becomingly.

'Indeed,' said Trafford, raising his hat as though presented to a prince. Cousin John instinctively touched his, intending to raise it, but stopping short produced an ungraceful effect.

'I have then to congratulate you on his return,' continued Trafford gravely.

'Yes, Mag and I are fast friends,' said John, patronisingly, and with agonising familiarity, quite elated, or rather confirmed in his estimate of his own importance by this mention of him by Maggie. 'Were you ever at the Cape, Sir? You stuck to that beast of yours as if you had learned to ride in the colonies.'

'I was there for a few months once,' replied Trafford courteously, 'but I always thought England the best school for riding,' and while he spoke to John, he looked at his companion—looked earnestly and interrogatively. She felt utterly and unspeakably miserable. To see Trafford, tall, slight, distinguished, in his admirably fitting and perfect morning dress, worn so easily; his careless grace of manner, that bearing as though the cream of life had always been his. And then to look at John, tall too, but lumbering and heavy, with the ends of his blue tie flying loose, and the brown patches of his trousers distractingly visible! His rough untutored red hair, and profuse beard, his great red hands innocent of gloves, his bumptious air, his appalling low-crowned hat! The contrast was too dreadful; and then, when he said, with an unmistakable air of proprietorship, 'Take my arm, Mag,' she felt she must obey, that she would not, could not, seem to slight him then, though he was deepening 'full many a fathom' the great gulf already fixed between her and such as Trafford. 'Do not let me keep you standing,' said that gentleman, 'I will turn with you, if you will allow me,' beckoning to his groom to follow; and so Maggie walked on as if in a dream, her hand held tightly against John's ribs, and Trafford at the other side of her. 'Do you stay long in town, Miss Grey?'

'I do not know, I am rather unsettled at present.'

'Good God!' thought Trafford, 'going to marry this ourang-outang. What creatures women are!' But he only said, 'I fancy London does not suit you so well as Paris; you are not looking so bright as I remember you, at the ball for instance.' This bit of irrepressible malice was intended for 'Cousin John.

Maggie gathered spirit enough to look up at him with something of her old smile, saying 'Ball dress and looks you know are not to be worn every day. But *you* look very much better than when last I saw you.'

'I have been away on the moors, which suits *me*, and have just come up from Mount Trafford, where I have been staying with Torchester. By the way, why did you never answer Lady Torchester's letter?'

'Lady Torchester's letter! I never received one, never!'

'That's a nuisance. I know my aunt wrote to you, and I rather fancied you must have left Paris, as she received no reply; but were your letters not forwarded?'

'My letters—no, indeed. I never thought of giving any directions about them. I never had any except from my cousins, and I was going to see them.'

'I was vexed, however, that you and Lady Torchester did not become acquainted. Will you write to her now and say you never had her letter?'

'Oh no! I couldn't,' said Maggie, shrinking from such an undertaking, and mournfully but proudly determined to renounce all intercourse with people so far out of her reach.

'As you like,' said Trafford coldly, considering this embarrassed refusal another infallible token of her engagement to the 'ourang.'

'And who may Lady Torchester be?' asked John, with an air of authority. 'I never heard of her before.'

'She is Mr Trafford's aunt, and he was good enough to think she might be of some use to me,' said Maggie with great steadiness, but breaking off suddenly.

'Oh! I see,' said John. 'Fact is, Sir,' to Trafford, 'this is such an independent piece of goods, she can't rest in her uncle's house, where she is like a daughter. But I think she'll find the best sort of independence in the colonies, eh!' and he winked knowingly at Trafford, the aristocratic, fastidious Trafford, as if they thoroughly understood each other. Maggie's misery and confusion were crowned by perceiving this triumphant indication; but she was too overwhelmed to utter a word. It speaks highly for the moral restraints of civilised life that Trafford, instead of then and there pouncing on Cousin John, tearing Maggie from him, and carrying her off bodily on the fiery chestnut, only smiled rather grimly, and said, 'At all events, life is freer everywhere than in England;' but it was more than he could endure. Maggie too, who at first

sight he thought looking pale and sad, had, between annoyance and embarrassment, gained a brilliant colour; she was evidently quite content, and it was all infernally disgusting; so with an imperious gesture he called up his groom, and bowing somewhat haughtily, he said to Maggie, 'I must say good morning, Miss Grey. Torchester will be pleased to hear of you. He and I start the day after to-morrow for St Petersburg, with very vague ulterior intentions; I must not therefore venture to say *au revoir*.'

'Good-bye, then,' said Maggie, simply, not offering her hand, as he seemed inclined to be satisfied with his own lofty salutation; but there was a sadness in her voice that made him hesitate a moment and long to say good-bye kindly; it was scarce a moment, and he mounted his horse, raised his hat once more, and then rode rapidly away—rapidly and more rapidly still, while his groom wondered where the 'dickens' his master was going. Away up the Edgware Road, threading in and out through vans and carriages and obstructive omnibuses—past Kilburn, and away into the open country, raging against himself for the idiotic weakness which permitted this brown-haired simple girl so to entwine herself with his heart, or his fancy, or his passions, or whatever was the source of the maddening irritation he felt, against her and himself, and that brute, her cousin, and the world in general, with its absurd bondage of social distinction. What an unpardonable little traitor she was, to think of such desecration as to give her sweet dainty self to this ourang! What undiscriminating dolls women are! Yet what was it all to him? What right had he to expect anything from her? Even if she was his, and all difficulties surmounted by his resolution to gratify an overwhelming whim, would he not feel that it had cost him too dear? This very cousin, how would he like to have him at dinner? Trafford was too well and safely placed to care with whom he was *seen* in public; it was from personal intercourse he shrank; and the very sincerity and loyalty he loved in Maggie would make her cling to every one who had ever been kind to her. But could she, with her innate good taste, her quick sympathies, her graceful, instinctive appreciation of everything that was noble and beautiful in art, could she absolutely take this clown 'for better, for worse'? Oh! it was too degrading! 'And,' Trafford thought, 'I fancied I had nearly cured myself of this folly. Well, she will finish the cure now. I can never again think of a girl who could be content with such a fate.

Yet, poor lonely child! the world is a hard place for her to battle through; and after all, it is not unnatural that she should give herself where she finds help and shelter—something more real than the sympathy and appreciation which, nevertheless, left her to Mrs Berry's vagaries and her aunt's brutality. That Cousin John does not look like a brute, rugged as he is. There is an honest and not unkindly expression in the dog's eye; so I suppose it's all for the best, and there's an end of it.' Arriving at this satisfactory conclusion, he drove the spurs into his horse's sides, and gave him another breather for a mile or so; and then, pulling up, remarked calmly to his groom, 'I think I have tamed the chestnut tolerably, Rogers?'

'Yes, Sir, I think you have,' returned the man, somewhat breathless from following after.

'Whereabouts are we?'

'Somewhere near the *Welsh Harp*, Sir.'

Meantime, Cousin John and Maggie had quickened their pace as Trafford rode away. 'Why that's no end of a swell, and no mistake! Where did you meet him, Mag?' asked John.

'Oh! in Paris, with Mrs Berry,' replied Maggie, listening to her own voice as if somebody else was speaking, and appalled at the black desolation that seemed to settle down upon her heart, as Trafford's cold look of disdain remained fixed upon her vision.

'How did she come across him? Now, why didn't she set her cap at him, instead of that beggarly Frenchman?'

'Because—because—even she never thought of such a thing. It was so utterly out of the question.'

'Then what was he after? You? Ay! you are a little trump. So you told him you had a Cousin John, away seeking his fortune, that you kept a corner of your heart for? Quite right, Mag! nothing like being honest and open.'

'I wish you wouldn't talk, John, I have a headache. I never told Mr Trafford anything of the kind. I said you had been very good to me when I was almost a child—and—oh! I don't know what.'

'Well, there, I'll not bother you. You'll tell me all about it by-and-by. Come along, we'll have a cup of tea and be off to the theatre. There's the "Overland Route," a capital play, and that will put you all to rights.' So spake John, giving himself credit for both prudence and magnanimity while he reflected: 'I'm not so sure I can afford a wife this year; but at any rate I see it's all

safe here, so I'll not bother Mag till we can go straight away to church.'

Everything was cloudy and unreal to Maggie that wretched night. She was utterly humiliated in her own eyes, to think that she should have been so shaken and upset by meeting that proud, haughty Mr Trafford. How different from what he was in Paris! No, she should not write to Lady Torchester; she would have no more to do with the Traffords. And John, how detestable John had made himself! How conceited, how patronising! Come what might, she would advertise to-morrow, and take the first thing that offered; even a happy home with an evangelical lady, nine small children, and no salary.

The visit to the theatre was a great relief; Maggie was carried away from self by the scenery and the fun. She laughed and she cried, and was altogether so charming in the sort of recklessness with which she snatched the little bit of enjoyment that obliterated for a while the sharp pain of memory, that John found it rather hard to stick to his own programme.

Supper was finished, and John's feelings did not prevent him from doing ample justice to it. Maggie and Bell had said good-night, and begun to ascend the stairs to their loftily placed dormitory, when John was heard calling authoritatively, 'Mag! come back I say! I want you.'

'What is it?' she asked, returning, while Bell continued to ascend.

'Are you going off without saying good-night, after our nice long walk to-day?'

'But I have. I have said good-night this moment.'

'I want a better good-night than that!' and he threw his arms round her; but she repulsed him with a vehemence and passion that astonished him.

'I will not and cannot kiss you,' she cried. 'If I want to kiss you I will do it of my own accord; but if you dare to kiss me against my will, you shall repent it bitterly,' and bursting into an agony of tears, she ran hastily out of the room.

'Phew!' whistled John, throwing himself into the only arm-chair. 'Now what was all that for! She can't really object to kiss me What humbugs these girls are!'

CHAPTER XX.

MAGGIE felt a little uneasy at meeting John after this ebullition, though she considered it quite justifiable; but he entrenched himself in an air of business and preoccupation, intending, he told himself, to let her come to her senses. So he departed in peace after breakfast, and it was not till evening that Maggie found time to plan out her advertisement, which she was quite resolved should not be delayed another day.

Tea was over. John was apparently absorbed in the City article of the *Times*—for the day of penny papers had only begun to dawn—and Bell was yawning over some needlework, when Maggie placed her writing things on the table very quietly, and, as she thought, unobserved. She was soon absorbed in the difficulties of her task, and grew absolutely nervous over it. What would she not have given for a few words of counsel with dear kind Uncle Grey?

'What are you about now, Mag?' asked Cousin John, so suddenly that she started.

'Trying to write an advertisement,' she answered promptly, and laughing rather nervously. John stood up, stirred the fire, and continued standing on the hearth-rug magisterially.

'Now, ain't you a foolish positive girl, to be bothering about an advertisement and wasting your money, when you've the governor's house to put up in till better times? I'm really vexed with you.'

'And why?' urged Maggie gently. 'You know I have no right to impose myself on Uncle Grey when I can earn anything for myself; and as to the better times, why should I not work while waiting for them as well as idle? I can accept fortune wherever it finds me.'

John rumpled his hair and seemed to think profoundly as he played with his watch-chain. 'Well,' said he at last, 'there is some truth in that; so advertise away in God's name—only, if you change your mind, remember my father's house is nearly as much mine as his, and if I say you shall be welcome there, you shall. Now what have you written?'

'Law, Maggie! what have you put?' cried Bell, laying down her work.

'I am very stupid about it,' said Maggie, blushing, 'will this do? —"As companion to an elderly lady, or governess to young children. A young lady who can speak and read French and teach music. A moderate salary."'

'Bosh!' growled John. 'You would be just as likely to get an immoderate salary, if you asked it, and be a deuced deal more thought of into the bargain. And why don't you say you are a smart accountant?—it's altogether a washy concern—put a little more "go" into it, can't you?'

'It is very hard to know how to put it. I wish my uncle was here.'

'Well, I flatter myself I can advise you as well, if not better than the poor governor, only you like him better—eh, Mag?'

'I do,' replied Maggie ruthessly, 'of course I do.'

'Well, you are an ungrateful little toad!' cried John energetically, 'and I'll be hanged if I take any more trouble about you. Didn't I stand to you stouter by long chalks than ever the governor did? He might cry over you in private, but he'd never prevent the missus from wiping her shoes on you. Wasn't I going over to Paris just to see you? and didn't I keep you in town because I saw you were breaking your heart about leaving? Don't I do all I can for you every way? And yet if a fellow asks for a kiss, you fly at him as if he was dirt under your feet! What is it you don't like in me? Just speak out.'

'I am not ungrateful,' said Maggie, frightened at this rough outbreak, and trying hard to keep back her tears, conscious that she did not feel towards John quite as she ought. 'I am fond of you and you see I *did* think of you and speak of you when you were away' (dexterously recalling Trafford's soothing remarks); 'but what I don't like in you is, that you think so much of yourself, and make little of your father, who is so simple and high-minded, and'——

'And pray why should I *not* think well of myself?' interrupted John, still angry, but mollified. 'Haven't I got on where another would have starved? Haven't I worked hard and lived hard? And now am I spending the fruits of my work on myself? Do I act as if I didn't care for my father? I show what I feel, without pretending to think that because he is my father he must be a wiseacre. He *is* a good fellow, but he is a d——d sight too soft

to be of much use. But nothing will please *you* that isn't a gentleman, a swell, like what we saw yesterday. I didn't think you would let such nonsense turn you against an old friend, ay! and a true friend.'

Maggie's heart beat fast. She knew there was truth in all John said, and she also felt that there was truth in her objections to him, only she could not express her meaning, and if she did, it would do no good. Moreover, like a true woman, she was intimidated by the force and vigour of a man's anger. So, wisely declining the contest, she exclaimed, 'You are angry and unreasonable, and I will go away.' She was hastily putting her writing things together, and shaken as she had been by the event of yesterday and a somewhat sleepless night, she could *not* keep back the tears. They dropped visibly on her portfolio.

'I'll be hanged if you go like this!' cried John, interposing himself between her and the door. 'You have riled me till I spoke rough, and now I'll not let you go till we are friends. I am sorry I vexed you, Mag—come, will you say as much?'

But Maggie couldn't say anything. She sat down and covered her face with her hands, while she struggled to resist a hysterical fit of weeping. John was somewhat puzzled at this utter breakdown, and attributed it to her sorrow at having angered him. He little knew its complicated causes. There were the remains of yesterday's agitation; there was the painful feeling of having vexed her true friend—the shame of knowing she would at that moment like to banish him for ever from her sight; there was the unspeakable dread that he had penetrated her secret weakness and folly; and, lastly, that awful sensation of being misunderstood and alone, which must madden if it lasts.

'Don't take on so, Mag! I say, Mag, I am ever so sorry I spoke hard.'

'And I am sorry I vexed you—that you misunderstood me,' said Maggie at last in a trembling voice. 'Some day you will know me better. And now I am tired and stupid; I will go to bed.'

'Well, we are friends again,' said John earnestly, holding out his hand.

'Oh, yes, I hope always.'

'Now, then, I will not offer to take a kiss, but give me one of your own accord, as you said last night.'

'I will, Cousin John,' said Maggie with sad humility, and so stood up on tiptoe and gave him a little refrigerated kiss.

But John was no nice observer. He had got what he wanted, and giving his fair cousin an elephantine pat on the shoulder, told her to go to bed, sleep sound, and be as right as a trivet in the morning.

The morning, however, brought with it a mighty change. The post, in addition to John's letters, had one for 'Miss Grey,' which Bell claimed and opened, but soon renounced: 'It must be for you, Maggie.' And it was. As Maggie turned over the paper a slip of newspaper fell out. She picked it up, and then with sparkling eyes cried, 'Listen to this, John!'

'"Miss Dunsford's compliments to Miss Grey, and begs to forward her the enclosed advertisement cut from this morning's *Times*. No time should be lost in applying, and Miss D. hopes it may prove suitable." The advertisement is from yesterday's paper. "Female amanuensis or secretary wanted by a lady of literary pursuits. Clear handwriting and a thorough knowledge of English required; also a person sufficiently well-bred to associate with her employer. Good references expected. A comfortable home and liberal salary will be given."'

'There's a go, by Jupiter!' cried John. 'Let's have a look,' and he caught the slip of newspaper out of Maggie's hand. '"Apply personally, between twelve and one o'clock to-morrow and Thursday, at No. 63, Hamilton Terrace, St John's Wood." That's today. You go in and win, Mag; I'll not interfere.'

'But,' said Maggie between hope and fear, 'I am afraid I am not clever enough for such a great lady as this must be, and I am sure I have not a thorough knowledge of English; but I will certainly try.'

'Who can it be?' wondered Bell. 'Perhaps Mrs S. C. Hall—or the authoress of "Emilia Wyndham."'

'How delightful that would be!' cried Maggie.

'I wonder what they consider a liberal salary?' said John. 'Thirty pounds a year?'

'And so it would be—very liberal,' replied Maggie. 'Seven pounds ten a quarter—nearly as much as I got for a whole year from Mrs Berry.'

'She was a frightful screw,' remarked John. 'Now mind, Maggie, you do not close with anything till you consult me.'

'I will not, indeed,' cried Maggie, eager to be friends again, especially as she began to hope there might be a way to escape.

It was with the utmost doubt and diffidence that Maggie arrayed

herself in her very best garments for this tremendous undertaking. She dared not hope for success, and she dared not contemplate failure; her fortunes seemed at a low ebb; and she revolved the advertisement over and over in her mind during her long lonely walk to Hamilton Terrace.

On arriving there she found it was a lady's school, evidently of high pretensions. She was ushered into an uncarpeted room looking into the garden, where, to her dismay, she found already assembled ten other applicants; some of whom were writing at a table, whereon a goodly display of writing materials were set forth.

'Will you please to write down your name and address, and references, and anything else you like,' said the servant; 'I will come back in a few minutes, and take in the papers to Miss Colby.' And gathering up some papers already written, she departed.

Maggie glanced at her rivals. There were a couple of neat fresh-looking girls, but the majority were severe, elderly, iron-grey females, not at all refined or prepossessing in appearance, 'though no doubt,' thought Maggie, 'miracles of ability in all matters connected with pens, ink, and paper.' She sat down, however, and tried hard to write as prettily and clearly as possible her short statement. The result was, that she thought she had never written so badly. It was finished long before the servant returned, and when she did she summoned one of the grisly females to an interview.

Hours seemed to have elapsed, and two or three more ladies were called away, before the smart servant came back once more, and looking uncertainly round, said, 'Miss Grey.'

Maggie rose at once and followed her, trembling.

In what seemed to Maggie a gorgeous drawing-room, overflowing with Berlin woolwork, vases of wax flowers and richly-gilt albums, and hung round with hazy water-colour and pencil sketches, sat the arbiter of her fortunes, enthroned in state. She was a small, stout woman, with wide-awake spectacles, a broad, eager-looking face an elaborate cap of fine lace, and a substantial brown silk dress; a small table beside her was heaped with letters and papers.

'Well,' she said querulously, but not uncivilly, 'I am sure I hope you will suit, for I am nearly worn out. A—Miss Grey, I see you only left the lady you mention here because she married. I suppose this Mr Dunsford will vouch for this?'

'He will. He has permitted me to apply to him because Mrs

Berry, I mean Madame de Bragance, is moving about on the Continent. I scarcely know where to apply to her.'

After a few more queries as to her antecedents, Miss Colby plunged into a description of the splendour of the appointment of which she had the disposal. 'The work would be entirely literary,' she said; 'accounts, and that sort of thing, would not be in the least required. The lady is young, nobly-born, and very wealthy; a most charming person—a former pupil of my own—of high literary and artistic taste, and indeed genius, but she finds it difficult to keep up society and—study, writing, and all that. She therefore requires a tolerably well-educated young person to copy compositions, to follow up ideas, and be generally useful with the pen. Do you think yourself equal to undertake this?'

'I am afraid to say much,' replied Maggie, colouring; 'but I am diligent, very glad to be useful, and though I think I can write tolerable English, a lady such as you describe could only want me to copy, not to originate.'

'Still, a proper knowledge is essential; but you probably have it. Now I will keep your address, and let you go, for I have a number more people to see. I will write to you in any case in a few days—oh! I forgot to mention the salary is sixty pounds a year. You would have (in the country) your own sitting-room, but I fancy you would not live with the family. Good morning.'

And Maggie was dismissed.

As she walked back she tried hard to dismiss all hope from her heart. It was altogether such a golden chance, she feared it could not be for her. Some all-accomplished mistress of the English tongue would appear to-morrow, and be chosen forthwith. Maggie only hoped Miss Colby would remember her promise and write, to put her out of pain.

'Well, Mag,' cried John, as he sat down to tea that evening, 'what luck? Got the place?'

'No!' said Maggie, shaking her head, 'only not quite rejected.'

'Come, tell us all about it,' said John.

And Maggie did.

'Hum!' said the family Mentor, when she ceased. 'I don't think much of it. This rich young lady will be marrying, as your widow did, and then you will be adrift again.'

'Still I will gladly take it if I have the chance.'

'I suppose you will; and when another marriage knocks you on

the head you will be obliged to marry, in self-defence, yourself, eh, Mag?'

'Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof,' said Maggie, laughing.

* * * * *

Four days went over, and still no communication reached our young waiter on Providence.

'Had I not better give it up, and put in my own advertisement?' she asked earnestly of Cousin John.

'No! hang it, no! Wait a day or two longer before you throw away any money on it. Look here, I am going to run down to Ditton Market to-night, just to see what the governor's doing. I'll be back late to-morrow. Wait till I come back, and then we will see what's to be done.'

Very well, John.'

'And just see my things put in the bag, like a good girl. I say! you've been as good as gold ever since I gave you that blowing-up the other night. Ah! "A woman, a spaniel, and a walnut-tree, the more you lick them"—eh, Mag?'

'You are a heretic and a Turk! Remember I have never withdrawn my accusations against you.'

'Pooh! if you can say no worse than that—I am not a sentimental chap—I don't care.'

The day John left was diversified by a stiff breeze with Bell. The agreeable Fred Banks called, and offered to take her and Maggie to a promenade concert. Maggie declined, and Bell was deeply indignant, and spoke some sharp and insulting words, which she afterwards tried rather abjectly to recall, having the fear of John before her eyes.

Tuesday morning was dull and raw; and though the absent John had made himself peculiarly obnoxious of late, Maggie confessed to herself that he was preferable to Bell in the sulks. But all reflection and meditation were put to flight, by the receipt at the twelve o'clock delivery of a note for 'Miss M. Grey.'

Miss Colby presented her compliments, and requested Miss Grey, if still disengaged, to call as soon as possible after the receipt of this.

'Dear, dear! you have got the place, I am certain. What luck, Maggie!' cried Bell.

'I really begin to hope it,' said Maggie, preparing for her expedition, and feeling 'all of a tremble,' as sensitive ladies term it.

On this occasion, our heroine indulged in an omnibus to a point

near Hamilton Terrace, and found the redoubtable Miss Colby attired in out-door dress, evidently waiting for her.

'I am so glad you have come at last, for there is a good deal to arrange, and I must go out. Your reference to Mr Dunsford is satisfactory, and Miss Grantham has decided to try you for three months, at all events. She wants you down as soon as possible. Can you go on Thursday?'

'Where?' asked Maggie, quite dazed with the rapidity of Miss Colby's conclusions and communications.

'Why, to Grantham. They will be there till after Christmas. It is in Limeshire, near Castleford—a beautiful country.'

'This is Tuesday. Do you not think the lady might allow me till Saturday? I have a few preparations to make, and it would be a great accommodation if I could stay till Saturday.'

'I really am afraid to take upon me to say,' and Miss Colby looked puzzled and vexed. 'She says,' taking up a note with an elaborate monogram, and covered with large straight writing, 'she says, "send this young lady down to me at once. I am standing still in every sense: nothing to do and no one to see."'

'Still,' urged Maggie, a little appalled at the seeming magnitude of the work which awaited her, 'I should like to stay till Saturday, if Miss—Grantham, I think you said?—will permit.'

'I tell you what. I will telegraph and tell her to telegraph back to you direct. That will show a proper attention to her wishes. Then if she says you must go on Thursday, you must. We will drive to the telegraph-office, and then you can return home. I have to go out to pay calls to-day.'

'But,' said Maggie, feeling her heart beat at the tremendous importance of her new mistress, 'will you not be so kind as to give me some idea of my duties—my work?'

'I have not an idea myself. I only know what Miss Grantham wrote. You will soon find out. Miss Grantham is most kind and generous—a little peculiar—and if you make yourself useful and obliging it may be a great hit for you. The carriage, I suppose, to the smart servant who opened the door at that moment. 'Come, then, Miss Grey. Oh, I forgot, Miss Grantham desired me to pay your travelling expenses. It is a long journey, and you *must* go first class. So I dare say, with cabs and that, it will cost nearly three pounds. There are three sovereigns, and full directions in this envelope. Come, now, we will drive to the telegraph-office.'

Maggie returned to Bell, morally breathless, and was subjected to a severe cross-examination—what she said, and what Maggie said, and what Miss Grantham's note looked like, et cetera, et cetera; and then, with the full consciousness that she had quantities to do, Maggie sat down on the horse-hair sofa in their little sitting-room, and began to dream of the new future opening before her. How tenderly she remembered poor Mrs Berry, fanciful and selfish and provoking as she was! She never could have the same feeling of equality and 'at-homeishness' with this great high and mighty Miss Grantham. Her life in Germany and Paris, dear, delightful Paris—ah! all that must be forgotten.

But she roused herself at last, and set diligently to work to turn out and arrange her belongings.

Time flew on, and as she settled herself to work, after a late tea, a sharp knock at the front door was followed by the entrance of the servant, with a mysterious yellow envelope. 'Oh the telegram!' exclaimed Maggie. 'It is short enough: "Saturday will do; come down by the 2 P. M. train." I am so glad I need not hurry away on Thursday.'

'And what in the world shall I do all alone here with John?' asked Bell in some dismay.

'Oh, just do your best! He is not so hard after all.'

'You don't know what he was till you came.'

The object of Bell's terrors, true to his appointment, returned to a late supper that night. The weather was raw and cold, so Maggie took care to have a nice bright fire, with a kettle singing beside it, an appetising little repast, and all things in readiness for the formidable John.

'Well, girls, how have you got on without me? By George, this is nice and comfortable! I declare it's worth while to go away to find such cosiness when you come back,' cried John, when he had got off his overcoat and muffler. He was in high good humour; all things looked promising at the new Dorado. 'You can't think how the governor's come out—quite sharpened up. I believe we'll make a man of business of him at last. He says he'll be very glad of your help, Mag, with the books—and, eh!'——

For Maggie murmured, 'Oh, John!'

'She's going away to this grand literary lady on Saturday, cried Bell.

'Gone and engaged yourself while I was away!' shouted John, indignant.

'But I thought we agreed I had better take the chance, if I got it?'

'Yes, but to go absolutely and fix it, without consulting any one, was coming it rather strong. And how about references?'

'Oh, they are quite satisfied with Mr Dunsford's, I know!'

'But you—have you had no reference?'

'*I?* I never dreamed of such a thing.'

'Well, you ought,' replied John sternly. 'How do you know this Miss Grantham may not be an impostor? How do you know you are not going into some disreputable place?'

'Oh, John! you would never think of such a thing if you had heard Miss Colby speak. She says this lady is nobly born, and wealthy, and'—

'She might *say* anything. It's our business to prove it. I will see Dunsford about it to-morrow.'

'I am sure it is all right,' said Maggie, dreading that the chance of independence and escape might be wrenched from her; for Cousin John did not seem at all willing to let her go.

'Well, I'll *make* sure, I can tell you,' said John, significantly.

* * * * *

And he did; but all his researches proved satisfactory. There was a residence called Grantham, near Castleford. It did belong to a lady of the same name, a personage of importance, who had livings in her gift and a small borough on her estates. So John had nothing for it but to give up his cousin, of whom he longed to make a petted slave, and let her escape into the higher atmosphere of personal liberty.

CHAPTER XXI.

NEVERTHELESS, when it came to saying good-bye, and she was absolutely in the train, Maggie felt a little sad. Yet the regret was more for the impossibility of loving John as she should like to do than for parting with him.

'I am deuced sorry you are going, Mag. However, you won't be out of reach; we can get you back. Now, mind you write to me direct. I won't be plagued with second-hand letters, and I will run down and see you as soon as I make my way a little clearer. God bless you!'

As he left the door of the carriage, a gentleman with a large black leather bag jumped in. He was considerably out of breath, but wore a complacent expression, having evidently just succeeded in catching the train, and proceeded to change his hat for a travelling-cap, to arrange his railway rug, to unfold his papers, and evidently prepare himself for a long journey. He was a large fair man, about forty-five or fifty, with a broad, honest, open face, and whiskers, of the peculiar tinge known as pepper and salt. Maggie observed him idly, for she had omitted to provide herself with book or paper; so sat watching the country as it flew past them, scarce able to believe that she was once more afloat and free.

Her fellow-traveller's newspaper lasted him for nearly forty miles; then he unlocked the bag, and drew forth a long blue paper, with a parchment angle and a green tie through it, which opened into a large folio, or rather many folios; into this he plunged, and was absorbed for another half-hour, till Maggie, finding herself grow chill, endeavoured to draw up the window at her side.

'Allow me,' said her companion, laying down his document and coming to her assistance. 'The evenings grow cold now. Would you like to look at the *Times?*'

'I should, very much, thank you.'

The voluminous sheet helped Maggie over many a mile. At Bletchly a lady and two little girls got in. Maggie soon made friends with the children, and as the shades of evening closed, her other travelling companions entered into conversation and chatted pleasantly enough. Maggie gathered that the gentleman was, like herself, going to Castleford. She was glad to think she should not be alone; company keeps up the spirits wonderfully. At C—— the lady and her children left them, and the gentleman asked Maggie if he could get her anything; he was going to have a biscuit and a glass of sherry himself. Maggie declined.

'Quite a frosty evening,' he said, as he seated himself again in the carriage. 'Afraid we'll have sharp, early winter. Going much further?'

'To Castleford.'

Indeed! We will not be there till 8.40, and I have some way to drive after.' So saying he settled himself to sleep, and Maggie endeavoured to follow his example. However, she could but doze uneasily, waking every now and then with a start, to feel half frightened at the rocking of the carriage (it was an express train) and the weird effect of the dimly-seen hedges and half-luminous smoke, as they flew past; growing very weary and rather sad, as the length of the journey impressed her with the idea that she was indeed going far away, into great unknown solitudes, wherein were dangers innumerable.

At last she was at her journey's end.

As she stepped out of the warm and well-lit carriage into the darkness of a bleak country station, the platform being raised high above the natural level of the country, Maggie could not control the trembling dread that seized her, partly the effect of exhaustion. As far as she could see into the gloom all looked open, drear, and bare. How was she to get on to her destination? The question was soon solved. A porter ran up with a lantern, exclaiming, 'Carriage here from Grantham for a lady and gentleman,' and set to work to extricate her luggage.

'We are still to be fellow-travellers,' said the man with the bag courteously. 'I suppose you have got your belongings?'

'Yes, thank you.'

'Then follow me down these steps; mind, it is rather dark at the bottom. Oh, here we are.'

A smart brougham, the coachman in mourning, and a large, spirited horse, stood at the foot of the steps.

The driver touched his hat, and assisted the porter to put up Maggie's two boxes. 'If there's any more we'll send over in the morning for it.'

'That's all,' said the porter.

Maggie was handed in most politely by her companion and they drove off rapidly, she feeling quite comforted not to be alone.

'Charming person, Miss Grantham,' said the stranger, who was evidently a little curious as to his companion, 'and a charming place.'

'I have never seen either. I am going to be Miss Grantham's secretary or amanuensis, and was engaged by a lady in London.'

'Oh, ah!' as though half amused. 'Well, I dare say she will be inundated with letters for some time. You will be pleased with the country. There is much to interest you in Grantham itself,

very old place—lots of relics and family pictures—rather dull in the winter; but I fancy Miss Grantham will keep the ball going. Five minutes to nine, I protest!—we were behind time a little. I shall not be sorry to have dinner, or something; and you, why you must be fainting! It is nearly five miles from the station to the house, but we will do it in twenty minutes more.'

Maggie was conscious of a short cessation of the rapid motion, of a shout of 'Gate!' and passing an open cottage door, from out of which came the ruddy glow as of a bright fire, and then rolling on over an exceptionally smooth road, while the rushing groaning sound of the wind, which had risen with nightfall, suggested the idea of thick trees. After what seemed an immense time since they passed the lodge, Maggie's companion exclaimed, 'There—there's the house!'

She looked, and there on the left, apparently over them, stood a large vague pile, four or five windows of which were brightly illuminated. It passed out of sight, and the carriage turned to the left and went up a short steep ascent. The next moment they stopped opposite a wide open door, which showed a large, brilliantly-lighted hall. Two men-servants in black, with all the trappings of livered woe, came out as they drew up; and one magnificent personage, the depth of whose mourning was only enlivened by a prominent shirt frill, stood in dignified readiness in the doorway. To Maggie's unsophisticated eyes he looked duke at least. She ascended the steps, longing in her heart to take fast hold of her new acquaintance's arm.

'Call Mrs Hands,' said the ducal functionary. 'Miss Grantham will see you at once, Sir,' he added respectfully to Maggie's companion.

'And this young lady?' said the gentleman kindly, seeing our little heroine look pale and miserable.

'Mrs Hands will be here, Sir, immediately to attend to Miss Grey,' and bowing, he motioned the new arrival forward. 'Good evening, then,' said he to Maggie, and as he spoke a tall, stout, solid, elderly woman in black, with black ribbons in her cap and a white apron—a woman of authoritative air, and somewhat old-fashioned servant-like appearance—came into the hall.

'Carry up the luggage at once,' said she to one of the gentlemen of the shoulder-knot. 'Come with me, ma'am, you must be cold and tired.'

The hall was large, nearly square, and very lofty. It was lit by

long narrow windows right and left of, and also above, the entrance, warmly draped with rich crimson stuff. Opposite the door two broad flights of steps, with balustrades of the same dark polished wood with which the hall was panelled, formed an arch over another door leading into the interior of the house. The ceiling was richly carved and gilt, and the floor tesselated with black, white, and grey marble; pathways of crimson carpets led across it in various directions, groups of hot-house ferns filled the angles; a large carved oak table, loaded with plaids, and fur rugs, and riding-whips, stood in the centre; numerous portraits hung upon the walls.

Maggie took all this in at a glance. The tremendous grandeur, the jump she seemed to have made into another world, all seemed to oppress her, as she followed her conductress up the stair and along a passage and down a few steps past a projecting window; and then they stopped at a door and entered a charming room of moderate size, with a mossy green carpet, pink and white chintz curtains, mirrors, a sofa, easy-chairs, ottoman, writing table, a cottage piano, a bright fire in a pretty tiled fire-place, and a tempting tea-table set forth beside it; the lamp lit—everything that could be desired, even some flowers. Maggie could not help uttering an exclamation of delight.

'This used to be Miss Colby's room,' said Mrs Hands; 'and,' throwing open a door beside the fire-place, 'there is your bed-room' —another smaller but equally dainty apartment, supplied with every comfort.

'I will make the tea while you take off your things,' said the grave Mrs Hands, and retired.

'Surely,' thought Maggie, with much gratitude, 'my lines have fallen in a pleasant place. I trust this is not too fair a beginning.'

'You have had a long journey,' said Mrs Hands, as she poured out the tea, and pressed cold ham and hot cutlet on her charge.

'I have been nearly eight hours travelling.'

'Yes, it is a weary journey from London. I seldom take it now. Would you not like some wine instead of tea?'

'Oh no! thank you. Nothing is so refreshing as a cup of tea.'

'Miss Grantham desired me to say she was sorry she could not see you to-night, but hopes to make your acquaintance to-morrow.

'Very well,' said Maggie, glad to secure a quiet night before encountering the formidable Miss Grantham.

'She's busy with the lawyer to-night. That was the lawyer as came down with you.'

'Oh, indeed!' After a little more talk—in which Mrs Hands informed Maggie that she had been 'our young lady's nurse,' and now had the charge of her wardrobe *and* the French lady's-maid, who was a regular handful—Mrs Hands rang. A neatly-dressed, fresh, country-looking girl answered the bell. 'Take away the things, Jane;' then, as she went out, added, 'she's a grand-niece of mine, and is to answer your bell and attend these rooms. When do you wish to be called in the morning?'

'Oh! at seven—eight—whatever time every one else gets up.'

'At eight, then. And look here,' opening the door; 'you see that door opposite there, next the big window? That's my room. And now can I do anything more for you?'

'No. I am very much obliged to you.'

'Good-night, ma'am; and I hope you will sleep well.'

* * * * *

Maggie did sleep well. There is something undoubtedly consoling in material comfort: a sense of security and elevation, when our surroundings are refined and pleasant to the eye, when food and drink are placed before us without effort on our own part, and we are free to believe that we can afford to leave our lower wants to the care and attention of lower creatures, while we develope our higher and nobler selves, independent of thought for what we shall eat or drink, or what we shall put on. Which, I hope, proves the necessity of an upper and an under crust to society, for ever and ever.

It seemed to Maggie that she had not long closed her eyes, when she woke again, and it was daylight. She felt wonderfully refreshed, and almost equal to the impending interview with Miss Grantham.

After a few minutes' dreamy thought she rose, anxious to view her new abode. The window of her bed-room looked into a paved yard, in which was an old-fashioned stone fountain, all mossed with age, and sheltered by a walnut-tree, the leaves of which were falling fast. It seemed to appertain to some of the offices, for a buxom kitchen or scullery maid, in a tucked-up dress and pattens, clattered across it while Maggie looked.

Her toilet completed, she proceeded to inspect her sitting-room. The window there looked over a wide undulating park, sloping away from the house till it sank between two wooded hills and gave a distant view of some green uplands with patches of brown ploughed land, all crowned by a far away line of mountain.

This fair scene was but dimly visible through sheets of drifting rain, blown hither by a strong shifting wind. The aspect of things without sent Maggie with a keen sense of comfort to the glowing ruddy fire—a delightful combination of coal and wood.

'Am I not very late?' she asked, as the neat little maid brought in her breakfast, seeing that the pretty clock on the mantelpiece pointed to ten.

'You were asleep 'm when I first knocked, and Mrs Hands said I was not to disturb you.'

It was curious to eat her breakfast alone, Maggie thought, but not unpleasant for once. She was utterly ignorant of the habits and customs of the life into which she was suddenly plunged, and everything attracted her attention. The snowy white of the delicate table linen, a luxury in itself; the beautiful polish of the slender old-fashioned silver; the queer little square tea-pot, its tracery faint, its ivory handle yellow from age. The lovely china with the exquisite colours of its butterflies and honeysuckle standing out on a clear, transparent, white ground. How delightful it all was! How suggestive of centuries of wealth, accumulated elegance, practised refinement. 'What a different world from mine!' thought Maggie. 'This is Lord Torchester's world. How could he ever think of me?' And though even in thought she would not name him, Lord Torchester was but the equivalent for another. 'I wonder, if I get used to this, shall I be loth to leave it? Not if I am left alone much. Loneliness is so depressing. Yes; this is very, very delightful! but I would give it all for the dear old parlour behind the shop at Altringham. *That* was Paradise to me. How my sweetest mother would have been charmed with this china!' And Maggie mused on dreamily, enjoying the unwonted freedom and luxury of an easy-chair all to herself. After her breakfast had been removed, the respectable Mrs Hands made her appearance.

'Miss Grantham hopes you have rested well, and wishes to know if you would like to go to church—the carriage will be at the door in twenty minutes.'

'Oh! no, thank you; I did not think of going; it is so wet, and I have not my things unpacked.'

Still no chance of seeing Miss Grantham. So Maggie read the Morning Prayers and Lessons, as she used to her mother on extra wet Sundays, and then she unpacked her rather scanty array of goods and settled them in the ample drawers and wardrobes, which

even after she had laid by her last ribbon, seemed an uninhabited desert.

'Now,' she thought, with virtuous resolution, 'I shall write to John and to Aunt Grey—both.' So she set forth her writing materials and began. But she had scarce finished the first page when a knock at the door arrested her progress.

'Come in,' said Maggie, laying down her pen, and only expecting Mrs Hands or Jane.

The door opened, and Miss Grantham entered. Maggie felt it must be the fair châtelaine. Yet she entered gently, with a smooth gliding step, her long rich black silk and crape dress trailing behind, and with the sweetest smile, Maggie thought, she had ever seen, held out a hand, so fair and taper, and loaded with jewels, that Maggie felt half inclined to kiss it, as if the owner were a queen.

'I have to apologise, Miss Grey, for this tardy welcome,' she said, in a rich, carefully modulated, but rather deep voice. 'I have been a victim to my lawyer, who travelled down with you—a most respectable diligent person, but just a little tiresome—and even now I have only a few minutes to myself—but sit down.' And Miss Grantham drew a chair at the opposite side of the fire to where Maggie sat. 'I hope you are rested and comfortable, and that Hands has taken care of you?'

'She has, indeed,' said Maggie, gazing, with sincerest admiration in her frank eyes, at her new mistress. 'My room is delightful, and so is this one.'

Miss Grantham smiled again very pleasantly; she was quite alive to the impression she had made upon her new secretary, who enjoyed a thorough good look at the splendid picture opposite to her.

A tall woman, whose outlines, though she was only just of age, had in them a rich full grace; a snowy throat; the faintest suspicion of a double chin; the jaw somewhat heavy; the lips full and crimson, parting to show spotless rows of pearly teeth. Large light blue eyes shone out steadily, fearlessly, from under a white brow and masses of golden fair hair, which were evidently too much for the skill even of a skilled lady's-maid. The soft, creamy-white skin, the peachy bloom of the cheek, made up a splendid specimen of Saxon beauty; and as she leant back in her chair there was an indefinable, haughty, careless grace in every attitude and motion.

'I shall not be free until Tuesday morning, when we shall set to work. I suppose Miss Colby told you what I wanted?'

'Not very clearly—and I sincerely hope I shall be equal to my task.'

'Oh! I am sure you will,' said Miss Grantham, kindly. 'Dear old Colby sent me a specimen of your writing—it is very nice; the rest I shall supply. You have been on the Continent, that is an advantage. Did you not like it?'

'Very, very much,' said Maggie, with a sigh. 'You have been there, of course?'

'A little; only a few months altogether. Poor grandpapa hated it, and I could not often get away. Pray, if not too impertinent a question, how old are you, Miss Grey?'

'I was twenty in August last,' replied Maggie, blushing under Miss Grantham's cool searching gaze.

'Indeed!' — another soft sweet smile. 'I should not have thought you so much. Now, tell me—how old would you take me to be? Speak frankly.'

'Oh! I cannot think,' said our heroine, too deeply interested in her subject to be conventional. 'You look as if you had ruled for many years. And yet your cheek is so fair and smooth, your mouth so soft, your expression so tender—altogether you must be quite young, perhaps not older than myself. Forgive me,' added Maggie, checking herself, and colouring deeply, 'I speak too freely.'

'Not at all; you speak *en artiste*, and show no mean powers of observation. I came of age last June, so I am not much your senior. Come, I see we shall accomplish a great deal of work together. Intelligence and legible writing—what a treasure Miss Colby has found for me!'

Another knock at the door. Maggie looked at Miss Grantham, who did not seem to notice it.

'It is your room,' said the heiress courteously, in reply to the look.

'Come in,' cried Maggie.

Enter the ducal butler, who with profound respect observed, 'Luncheon waits.'

'I am coming,' said Miss Grantham, without turning her head. 'I am afraid'—addressing Maggie—'I shall not be able to see you again to-day or to-morrow; but you read—you like reading? I will send you some papers and magazines—and ring for whatever you want. If to-morrow is fine, Lady Dormer will take you out to drive. Adieu for the present.' And Miss Grantham swept away, evidently well-pleased with her new acquisition, while Mag-

gie remained standing where Miss Grantham had left her, penetrated with a sudden enthusiasm for this lovely, gracious, queen-like patroness, whose grandeur was yet so genial that, modest as was Maggie's estimate of herself, she felt no dread, no diffidence; rather all personal feelings were swallowed up in complete admiration; all the suppressed romance, of which our lonely little waif had enough and to spare, sprang into light, and fastened upon this delightful subject.

'She is like a princess for whom kings might do battle!' said Maggie to herself, 'and so sweet and kind! How wonderfully fortunate I am! How grateful I ought to be to God for directing me here! I do hope I shall please her—but I must, for I shall understand her.'

So Maggie finished her letter to John in a most rapturous tone, and then she thought of the contrast between that right trusty cousin and the high-born dame who had just left her. 'I wonder,' speculated Maggie, 'if John would feel any awe of Miss Grantham! I dare say he would lay down the law to her as if she was like any one else—he has no imagination;' but she might have added—a right manful and independent spirit.

Miss Grantham, true to her promises, sent Maggie a pile of weekly papers and publications; and between reading, writing, and reverie, Sunday passed over very well.

Monday was again wet, and dragged a little heavily, though Maggie had her needlework, and tried to be busy.

After her early dinner, Mrs Hands came in. 'Lady Dormer's compliments; she would be happy to see you, if you would like to pay her a visit.'

'Yes, I should,' said Maggie, a little puzzled. 'Please tell me who is Lady Dormer.'

'Oh! she is our young lady's aunt, and always lives with her, by way of taking care of her; and a very nice, harmless lady she is—not like Miss Grantham, you know.'

'No, no! no one is like her,' cried Maggie, with a genuine enthusiasm that won the old nurse's heart; 'she is lovely and so kind. But am I dressed enough to go and see Lady Dormer?'

'Ay! you are as neat as a new pin; she will be quite pleased with you.'

Maggie accordingly followed Mrs Hands to the staircase, where she was committed to the guidance of a tall footman, who conducted her across the hall and down a passage, and then, throwing open a

door, announced 'Miss Grey,' in what Maggie considered a terrific manner.

By the side of a large fire, in a luxurious easy-chair, a work-table and a large basket of bright-coloured wools beside her, sat an elderly lady, very stout, with a broad, a placid, and rather unmeaning face. She was dressed like every one else, in deep mourning; and as the room was furnished with a somewhat dingy green, the eye was not a little relieved by a mass of crimson wool which lay in her lap, and on which she was operating with a huge wooden crochet needle.

'Put a chair here,' were her first words, addressed to the footman. She made an effort to rise, but failed, as Maggie came forward with a slight courtesy. 'Very glad to see you—pray sit down. Shocking weather—winter all at once. If it had been fine, I should have taken you out with me. My niece said it would have been very nice—she is quite worn out, poor dear! with that tiresome lawyer.'

'It must be very tiresome,' echoed Maggie, rather at a loss what to say. Lady Dormer's voice was pleasant for the first sentence or two, and then it grew wearisome from its unvarying tone.

'Do you like the country?' after a pause.

'Yes, very much; this must be a beautiful place in fine weather.'

'Oh, very nice, indeed; so quiet. I sleep much better here than in London. But I sleep very badly at night; very badly indeed.'

'That is very trying,' said Maggie, seeing she paused for a reply.

'Yes! isn't it. I am often glad to get a little sleep in the daytime. Do you like crochet, Miss Grey?'

'I do not know much about it; but I can do the stitch.'

'It is very pretty and useful. I am doing a shawl for Hands—she feels the cold a good deal. I offered to do one for Miss Grantham; but she says it would make an old woman of her, and that I had better make it for Hands. It is a pity these patterns are so complicated; I can scarcely make this one out. My niece often helps me; but she is too busy to-day. Miss Grantham really seems to understand everything.'

'If I could assist you,' said Maggie, shyly, 'I would be very pleased.'

'I am sure you are very good,' replied Lady Dormer, brightening. 'You see where this shell comes—the pattern ought to stand out, and it won't.'

'Let me see,' said Maggie, taking the bright, warm mass from her ladyship's fingers, and gazing with intent eyes upon a magical receipt, where words and figures were jumbled in the most cabalistic fashion. An interval of intense application ensued, and then for more than a mortal hour did Maggie gently instruct the dullest of pupils in the mysteries of chain 6, miss 3, 9 chain, 1 plain, &c.

'I am sure I am greatly obliged to you,' said Lady Dormer at last; 'I shall go on all right now. If to-morrow is fine, and Miss Grantham does not want you, I shall take you out to drive after luncheon.' And Maggie felt she was dismissed.

'What a wonderful household,' she thought, as she regained her own quarters without guidance. 'I have seen three men-servants, two women-servants, and an aunt, and heard of an indefinite multitude of other retainers; and all seem to hang on the will of a girl not much older than myself. One need be born in the purple to sustain such a weight!'

Mindful that Miss Grantham had said she would be free on Tuesday, Maggie rose early, and had finished breakfast long before the expected announcement reached her—'Mademoiselle Grantham vous demande, Mademoiselle;' for it was a little dark-eyed French girl, in a poetic cap, that brought the message.

Maggie replied in the same language, pleased to speak it again; and the *femme de chambre* was delighted.

Miss Grantham was in her dressing-room, a charming but old-fashioned apartment, adorned with rose-coloured brocaded silk panels, white and rose curtains, couches, and footstools, while the chairs in green velvet were a pleasant contrast.

She was at breakfast, in a long *peignoir* of white cashmere embroidered with an elaborate pattern in black silk.

'I am an escaped bird this morning,' said Miss Grantham, laughing, as Maggie entered, 'though just the least bit of an invalid. I have a slight cold, and am indulging in a solitary breakfast. Have you breakfasted?'

'Some time ago.'

'Well, sit down. I have one or two letters here you might answer for me; but in the mean time—Some more coffee, Cécile,' interrupting herself—'I must tell you that the work in which I particularly want your assistance is a novel. I sketched it out and began it a long time ago, but met with so many interruptions that I have not got beyond the third chapter. Now I cannot go much

into society or do anything for the next six months ; so I thought if I could give a couple of hours daily to it, with your help in copying and carrying out my ideas, I might get it done by February or March, before I go up to town to be presented. It would be charming to hear every one wondering "who the author of so-and-so can be." By the way, I cannot think of a title, and yet I have the whole plot sketched out ; perhaps you will be able to give me an idea—and if you only have as much genius for literature as Aunt Dormer says you have for crochet, you will indeed be a treasure-trove.'

'Literature and crochet are widely different.'

'*Allons, nous verrons*—Eh ! Cécile. No, nothing more, thank you. Come, Miss Grey'—rising and leading the way through a door nearly opposite to that by which Maggie had entered—'this is my study.'

It was a handsome room, three sides filled with book-shelves, the other occupied by two windows draped in rich red-brown velvet, with busts between. The mantelpiece was enlivened by a clock and vases in old Dresden china. A leather-covered writing-table was loaded with appliances for writing; and jardinières, in every position, lightened the chamber with colour and perfume.

'Oh ! what a quantity of books,' cried Maggie, delighted.

'You love reading, then,' said Miss Grantham. 'Well, you may come here and read whenever you like; only, when I am in a very solitary mood, I shall tell you to run away to your own room with the book of your own choice. Now here are these two epistles: one is from the Society of Female Artists—they want me to be an honorary member ; the other from the Emancipated Missionaries for the Conversion of the Zooloo Tribes, who want me to subscribe. I shall be proud to be enrolled amongst the former and send them a cheque to help their funds. Tell the others I am a thorough Churchwoman, and would prefer their leaving the unfortunate Africans to their *original* fetish. I shall finish dressing while you write. You will find everything you want on that table.'

It was a tremendous task, for Maggie had no idea how to set about it. However, she read over the first letter carefully, and framed her reply upon it. Before she had quite concluded Miss Grantham returned.

'Let me see,' she said, taking the paper from her hand. 'You write for me, not for my signature—well, perhaps it is better. That will do. I see you have left a blank after the word

"cheque": fill in "fifty pounds." Now as to the other—oh, never mind, I will not answer it; it is not worth attending to. Now I must show you what I have done,' opening a large portfolio and taking out numerous loose sheets. 'Here is my novel. I will read you a little and then tell you the plot.'

Miss Grantham leaned back in her chair, reading rapidly and somewhat monotonously:—

'It was a dull rainy morning, and the purlieus of St Paul's were darker than ever, when the head waiter at the *Crown and Anchor*, in Paternoster Row, coming into the bar, which was lit with gas, said to the blooming young lady who presided over the bottles and preserves, "This is a rum go."

'"What?" asked the barmaid.

'"Why, the baby, to be sure. The old lady what came here last night with the baby went out this morning to buy a heasy pair of boots, and has never come back, and the child's screaming in No. 11, and no one knows what to do with it."

'"Poor little soul!" cried the barmaid, the maternal instincts of whose feminine heart had defied years of chaff, of sordid routine, and even the indurating effect of doubtful money, to stifle. "A ha'porth o' milk boiled down with a rusk will comfort it. P'raps the woman will turn up in an hour or two."

'"Not she," returned the head-waiter; "she has bolted."' And so on for nearly an hour, detailing how the buxom barmaid took the deserted infant and formed a profound attachment to it, feeling convinced, from its lovely form and delicate garments, that it was the child of noble parents.

'There, I am really quite tired,' said Miss Grantham, pausing suddenly. 'Now, what do you think of that?'

'It is very interesting. I wonder how it could all come into your head,' said Maggie, dimly conscious that she had heard something like it before, yet really surprised that so great a lady should begin her narrative at so low a stage of life.

'Well, you see, I want to describe a heroine whose native nobility will come out under the most adverse circumstances. She is really of very high race. Her father and mother have been privately married, and the father has been killed—oh, somewhere—and then the mother, who must be a bad, ambitious woman, wants to marry a Russian prince, and so wishes to suppress this baby, and gives it, with a large sum of money, to a cruel, avaricious old nurse, who determines to keep the money and get rid of the child

Of course all sorts of adventures can be introduced. She must go on the stage—I mean the baby—and fascinate her own cousin, besides quantities of other men—and, oh, I have such a charming hero!' and, quite animated with her subject, Miss Grantham turned over the pages to find the description of the hero.

'But,' said Maggie, sincerely interested, 'I wish you could make the father bad and the mother good. A bad mother is so horribly unnatural.'

'Do you think so?' said Miss Grantham, pausing in her search. 'Well, there are plenty of bad mothers in novels, and it is so easy to kill a man. He goes into all sorts of dangers, a soldier especially. Besides, a baby isn't such a drawback to a man as to a woman. You are quite right to give me your candid opinion, but I think I must keep my wicked mother. I cannot find the passage I want, but we shall come to it as we go on. Now, suppose you copy out what I have read. It is horribly written and full of mistakes, but you can make it right. You must call my attention to any alterations that suggest themselves. I want you to be perfectly candid.'

'I will be, indeed. I only wish I was more experienced and learned to be of more use to you.'

'You would only interfere with my originality if you were,' said Miss Grantham. 'Do you understand about the inverted commas, and paragraphs? Leave plenty of room, and only write on one side of the paper.' So saying, she placed ruled paper, a forest of pens, and a huge inkstand, beside her secretary. 'I shall go and see Aunt Dormer and hear if she has letters, and then I shall come back and answer my own.'

Maggie set very diligently to work, and had produced three fair legible sheets, with all proper paragraphs, marks, and signs, before her employer returned. Her training with poor Uncle Grey stood her in good stead, though she did not like to confess to herself that it was less tiresome to copy his papers than the conversations of Miss Grantham's characters. True, there was much of Uncle Grey's lucubrations which she could not understand, but then there were bits she did, and those interested her intensely.

'What a quantity you have done! how nice and clear!' cried Miss Grantham, peeping over her shoulder. 'You must have done this sort of thing before.'

'I used to copy papers for my uncle.'

'Was he a literary man?'

'No, he was scientific, rather; he is a chemist.'

'Indeed! I should like to understand chemistry above all things. In short, I should like to know everything; but one hasn't time. Have you made any alterations?'

'Oh, no. I would not do so unless I pointed them out to you. I have left a blank for "Paternoster Row:" I fancy somehow there are no hotels there, only booksellers.'

'Well, perhaps not; we can easily find another.' Then Miss Grantham sat down to her own special writing-table—a marvel of convenience and taste—and wrote for a few minutes, then talked for a while, and wrote again, and then exclaimed, 'It is almost luncheon-time. We have done quite a hard morning's work, and I feel as if I had quite earned my luncheon; while you must be almost faint with starvation. You breakfasted an hour before me. Come down with me; I shall not leave you in solitary confinement any longer. Lady Dormer will be charmed to see you at luncheon.'

I fancy Maggie would have enjoyed her dinner more alone. Nevertheless it was an experience that amused her.

Miss Grantham did not use the great dining-room when there was no company at the Hall. Still the smaller one seemed magnificent to Maggie. The display of the table—the plate, the fruit, the flowers—all appeared too grand for common use. It was appalling, too, to be waited on by a powdered epauletted gentleman, to have the ducal butler, who did not even seem a duke in disguise but a duke evident and unmistakable, inquiring confidentially if she preferred sherry or hock.

It all seemed natural and common enough to Miss Grantham. She was a little fastidious, and spoke rather sharply about a salmi of partridges which did not please her.

'Wheeler' (to the butler), 'this is not at all right. Pray tell Pécheron that he must not grow careless because we are alone. If he does not care to please me, why he had better leave.'

'Yes 'm,' said the noble functionary, with profound attention.

'Take it away. You cannot eat that, Miss Grey.'

'It is not so bad,' remarked Lady Dormer, contentedly.

'Bad! Why is it not good?' said the heiress.

And then there was silence, and Lady Dormer observed that 'Poor dear Lord Brockhurst was ordered away to Algiers.'

'Indeed,' cried Miss Grantham. 'Is Lady Brockhurst going with him?'

'I don't know. Miss Ashton mentions it.'

'I fancy she will not. It would be such banishment for her.'

'What do the Longmores say about coming here?' asked Lady Dormer—and so on about people and things quite unknown to Maggie. Just before they rose from table Miss Grantham said to her aunt, 'Oh! I am going to take Miss Grey out with me, she can go with you another day, if you don't mind.'

'Very well,' said Lady Dormer, placidly.

'I shall be ready in about half an hour, and show you something of the country. I drive at a better pace than Aunt Dormer. You would like to come?'

'Yes, very much; but ought I not to stay in and write?'

'Oh! you need not be so very indefatigable! we shall grow stupid if we have no recreation.'

When Maggie descended with her bonnet on, she found a beautiful pony carriage with a pair of perfect little white ponies, sleek, and rampant spirits, standing at the door. A tiny groom, in spotless buckskins, exquisitely fitting top-boots and livery, standing at their heads. While Mr Wheeler looked on critically and approvingly from the doorstep.

Miss Grantham issued from the morning-room a moment after, looking superb in a crape and bugle bonnet. The butler and two footmen assisted each other in the tremendous task of handing the ladies in and arranging a tiger-skin rug, and then Miss Grantham took the reins, shoulder-knot No. 1 called out 'all right' to the tiny groom, who stepped aside, and the white ponies darted away at a speed that half frightened Maggie.

'They are very fresh this morning,' said Miss Grantham, 'but you need not be alarmed, I am a capital whip.'

It was a fine calm autumnal day after the previous storm and rain, and deeply Maggie enjoyed the beautiful woodland scenery through which their road lay—wide rolling uplands, wooded dells, open park-like spaces dotted with deer, deep lanes, their broken rocky banks clothed with a wealth of many-tinted leaves. The smell of the pine trees, the rush of rivulets swelled by the late rains, the delicious, cool, clear air. What a paradise it all seemed to poor Maggie. What a delightful change it created in the current of her thoughts.

Miss Grantham seemed to enjoy her enjoyment. 'Yes, it is a lovely country. I am very fond of it, but it is fearfully dull; and now poor Lord Brockhurst is obliged to go away, the county will be a desert, Southam shut up and Grantham shut up (for it would

not be decent to fill the house for three or four months). I suppose Limeshire will not have had so dull a winter for many years. I am very vexed about the Brockhursts. Lady Brockhurst is my greatest ally—the most fascinating woman—knows everything and every one—has been everywhere. I always was flattered by her notice—she is older a good deal than I am, and is very exclusive—abhors commonplace; but she always liked *me*.'

Maggie speculated on who and what this lady could possibly be, whose notice could flatter so great a personage as her companion.

Miss Grantham talked on and enlightened her secretary as to her views on various subjects—her intended doings in London, and possible travels in foreign countries. She seemed to Maggie as if she was somewhat intoxicated with a sense of freedom and power, though too well bred to show it in any offensive manner, but that she could scarce make up her mind which path of pleasure to choose among the many that offered.

On approaching the Hall, which they did not until dusk, the diligent secretary said, 'I suppose I can go into your study and write this evening. It is really a pity to waste too much time.'

'You will overtake me too soon,' said Miss Grantham smiling. 'But you can do so, certainly, if you like.'

'The rector is with her ladyship,' said the butler, as they alighted.

So Miss Grantham, with a pleasant nod of dismissal, went towards the drawing-room, and Maggie mounted to her own quarters.

The next morning brought her a letter from Cousin John, who wrote in a rather surly tone. He warned her that all was not gold that glittered, that the finery which she described would only make her more conceited than ever, and when she was sent adrift, as she would be one day, she would be glad to fall back on plain honest people who knew their own minds.

'Poor dear John,' thought Maggie, who was always fonder of him at a distance, 'how cross he was when he wrote. But in one thing he is right, my tenure of office is very uncertain, and always will be, I am afraid, so I must make the most of the present.'

CHAPTER XXII.

The stream of life settles very quickly into new channels. In a week Maggie had become accustomed to the routine of Grantham, though she found steady application under Miss Grantham's auspices quite impossible. Some new and urgent occupation for her pen was found nearly every day: a catalogue on an improved plan was designed for the library; a descriptive list of the family portraits, with anecdotes and sketches of the periods to which they belonged, was eagerly begun, and Maggie was excessively sorry to be withdrawn from it, to arrange and decipher the rough drafts of a poem in blank verse which Miss Grantham had commenced on 'Simon de Montfort.'

What a lavish waste of time it all seemed to our little Maggie, trained in such a different school; however, she told herself she had no right to complain. She found time for some steady reading, and an unlimited supply of standard authors in the library. Finally, she steadily grew in favour with Miss Grantham, who made her the constant companion of her drives and walks.

Sometimes her kind but whimsical mistress was amused to hear the reminiscences of her simple life, and was evidently charmed and touched by Maggie's description of her mother and her home. She seemed flattered by Maggie's timid offer to show her her greatest treasure—her mother's picture. 'It is a sweet face,' said Miss Grantham, after looking at it earnestly, 'and looks like a gentlewoman. You are like her a good deal. What was her name?'

'Everard,' said Maggie, more than ever drawn to her fascinating patroness.

'A good name,' remarked Miss Grantham, thoughtfully. 'Do you know anything of your mother's people?'

'Nothing whatever. I do not think she did.'

'My dear Miss Grey! I shall write a story about you some day. I am sure you are, or will be, the centre of a romance.'

So October fled away; and Miss Grantham, in spite of her varied employments, began to be intolerably bored.

Maggie was quite grieved to see a restless dissatisfied expression

saddening her countenance, but was ignorant how to dispel it. Indeed, from time to time, she caught glimpses of a vacuum in her admired friend's life, or heart, or fancy, which neither rank, riches, conscious beauty, nor intellectual occupation seemed to fill.

One day Miss Grantham had gone out, after luncheon, with Lady Dormer, and Maggie had taken advantage of their absence to play over some of the lessons she had learned with poor M. Duval. She was so employed when Miss Grantham, returning sooner than she expected, entered unperceived, and listened for a few minutes without speaking. 'You really have a very nice touch, Miss Grey,' she said, to Maggie's confusion. 'You ought to practise every day. Do you think you could play my accompaniments? I cannot bear to sing and play both.'

'I am afraid I could not do well enough—but I should be so delighted if I could.'

'We will try at once,' cried Miss Grantham, throwing aside her bonnet. 'Come to my study, my music is there; you may find something you know.'

After turning over the voluminous store, Maggie found a pretty little *chansonette*, over which she had toiled wearily with Mrs Berry, striving with indifferent success to make that lady sing in tune.

'I think I might manage this.'

'Begin, then; though I have not sung it for months.'

Miss Grantham's voice was of rare quality, clear and rich. It had been most carefully cultivated; while nature had bestowed upon her a real genius for music. All her other pursuits were mere whims. Music—dramatic music—was her true vocation. Maggie was soon too much entranced to think of her own possible failure, and acquitted herself very creditably.

'How deliciously you sing! How is it I have not heard you before?' she cried, turning to Miss Grantham, her eyes moist with genuine delight. 'It is like a peep into another life to hear you! I wonder you are not singing all day.'

'I have been out of humour with many things lately, music among them; and then, imagine singing to Lady Dormer! Now that I find you are musical, it will be quite different. You really can be of the greatest use to me as an accompanyist; but you must practise and get up all my songs. Let me see what else you can play.' And so the whole afternoon went pleasantly over; and after dinner Miss Grey was requested to join Miss Grantham and

Lady Dormer in the green drawing-room, to play for the latter's admiration; and her ladyship did admire to the best of her ability, and then fell asleep.

'You must look over all my music, and get up the songs I have down here,' said Miss Grantham, 'while I am away; for I was going to tell you to-day, only the music put it out of my head, that Aunt Dormer and I are going over to Oatlands, the Longmores' place, for a week or ten days, and I shall probably go on to London for a day or two. I have not been there since grandpapa died, and I want various changes before we go up for the season, if I go; so you will have plenty of time to practise and write and read. I hope you will not feel very lonely. You must drive every day if you like, and work my ponies a little.'

'And when do you go?' asked Maggie, somewhat dismayed at the idea of being left all alone in that huge house.

'The day after to-morrow. You are to be sure and ask for everything you want; and all my music and books are heartily at your service. You will have Nurse, too, to take care of you, so pray do not look melancholy.'

'Oh! no. I shall miss you dreadfully—you have been so wonderfully good to me—but of course I can never hope to see so much of you again, when the first days of your mourning are over.'

Miss Grantham smiled graciously. 'I am not sure I would not rather have you with me, provided we had a few additions, than go to the Longmores. They are cousins of mine, some of the immense family tribe; old Mrs Longmore was grandpapa's sister. They are very good-natured, commonplace people. They think me—oh! I don't know what they think of me; they are such old Tories, and I am, you know, extremely Liberal; but for all that, they are most palpably anxious to marry me to the son and heir, Grantham Longmore. Such a well-bred, unobjectionable muff! Imagine *me* marrying the quiet respectable representative of a quiet respectable country family!'

'If you do not like him, that is the best reason against such a marriage,' said Maggie, gravely; deeply interested, for it was the first approach to the usually attractive topic of matrimony which Miss Grantham had made. 'But you have everything in the world already, what more could any one give you—except the devotion of a character worthy of you?'

'Yes! I should like rank,' said the heiress, thoughtfully. 'I don't mean to marry a man of rank, but to have it myself. It is

such a shame that the barony of Grantham did not descend in the female line. I should then be the twenty-first possessor of the title! but I am determined to get it. As to a possible husband, I do not care if he be rich or poor, titled or untitled, but he *must* be well born, well bred, well educated; with pluck, ability, and force of character; high-minded enough not to care for my possessions or my position; and with warm blood enough in his veins to love me passionately for my own sake. I don't care for his being handsome, but he must be tall and *distingué*, and a good deal older than myself.'

'Ah!' said Maggie; 'where will you find all that?'

'It can be found,' said Miss Grantham, with a far-away look in her large blue eyes, and a slight tender smile on her lips.

'She thinks she has found her hero,' said Maggie to herself. 'Perhaps such chivalrous compounds are to be more easily found among her class than mine. God grant her happiness, at all events.' But she said nothing, only touched a few chords absently.

After a variety of directions respecting the sixth chapter of the novel, for which Miss Grantham only left notes to be amplified by her secretary, the heiress, with her aunt, her French maid, and the illustrious Wheeler to escort them as far as Castleford, departed.

Maggie did not feel quite so desolate as she anticipated. In her own bright little sitting-room, she did not realize the immensity and emptiness of the house, and she had plenty to do. Most earnestly she practised all the songs indicated by her kind, genial employer, and worked, not less willingly, yet certainly less *con amore*, at her literary labours.

Each morning she received a polite message from the butler to know if she would drive that afternoon, and as regularly she sent a polite reply, stating she would not. To have that exquisite little carriage with its spicy ponies and saucy groom paraded on her account would have been about as severe an infliction as she could well have been condemned to.

Busy, however—and pleasantly busy—as she kept, she could not through all these solitary hours help sometimes remembering the previous occasion on which she had been left alone by Mrs Berry! She certainly enjoyed *that* interval considerably more—but then it was all a piece of folly which she must forget—a weakness of which she ought to be and was ashamed. Surely such an unsubstantial vision would not haunt her for ever!

After mature reflection, she asked the respectable Mrs Hands to

walk with her sometimes, as she did not like to go far alone; and that worthy female was much pleased. During their peregrinations the good nurse told many family matters to 'my young lady's secretary,' matters, not secrets—for a word derogatory to that sacred house would never cross her lips. She also showed Maggie the old lord's part of the house—with the old family pictures which had been saved when the castle (which used to stand on the site of the present house) was burned. Then Miss Grantham wrote twice—first from Oatlands, giving an amusing and rather sarcastic description of the party there assembled; and next from London, evidently written under depression of spirits.

Altogether, nearly six weeks had gone by, and still the mistress of the mansion had not returned.

At last, on a Monday afternoon, Mrs Hands came into Maggie's room as she was rejoicing in having conquered '*Robert le Diable*.' (I mean the music of that work.)

'I'm glad to tell you, Miss Grey, Mrs Deane, the housekeeper, has just had a telegram. Miss Grantham and my lady will be back to-morrow—and they are bringing company—for we are to have the east bed-room and the blue room ready—they will come by the 2 0 express.'

'Then you have no idea who Miss Grantham is bringing with her?'

'I suppose it's Miss Longmore and her brother; she could not very well have regular company.'

Maggie felt quite exhilarated at the prospect of having Miss Grantham at home once more. She was proud to think how well she had prepared her tasks.

A long, lonely, but agreeable ramble in the park helped the day well over, and about half-past eight the noise of the arrival penetrated even to Maggie's sanctum. Had Miss Grantham and her aunt been unaccompanied by any guests, Maggie would have ventured down to greet them, but as they were not alone she did not like to intrude.

She half hoped Miss Grantham would look in for a moment or send for her, but no message came.

'Miss Grantham has arrived, then?' she said to her little attendant when she brought in her supper.

'Yes 'm—they are at dinner now. Miss Grantham and Lady Dormer have brought two gentlemen with them; but I don't know their names.'

After waiting up considerably past her usual hour, Maggie went to bed just a shade disappointed.

Next morning she had just finished breakfast, when Miss Grantham came in dressed, and evidently on her way down-stairs. She looked handsomer than ever—there was the radiance as of a great joy in her face.

'We were so late last night I thought there would be no use in looking for you when I came up,' she said, kissing Maggie lightly on the brow. 'But I am very glad to see you again, and very glad to come back. Though I shall be rather engaged for a few days. I must see what you have been doing, however; so let me find you in the study after breakfast. You must come down to luncheon to-day—I want to know what you think of my guests. Do you know, I think Grantham must agree with you. You look so much better than when you came down.'

'And London must agree with you,' said Maggie, gazing at her with sincerest admiration. 'You are looking several shades more bright and beautiful than when you left!'

'Do you really think so?' said Miss Grantham, earnestly; and looking deliberately into the chimney-glass. 'But there is the bell; good-bye for the present.'

About an hour after Maggie settled herself to re-arrange and touch up the sheets she had prepared during her fair patroness's absence. They looked very nice and clear, she thought, and then she wished Miss Grantham would come, but she didn't; and, tired of waiting unemployed, Maggie rose to take down a book. Some old volumes of Blackwood into which she was fond of dipping, occupied a corner of the bookshelf near one of the windows, and she paused as she did so to look out on the scene below.

Miss Grantham's apartments and her own occupied the second floor of one wing, which stood on a sort of terrace or sudden acclivity; and the study windows looked down on a mass of trees, which clothed its side, and then away over a magnificent prospect of undulating park and distant blue hills. She had never enjoyed the view so much before. 'Tis true the leaves were gone, but the innumerable branchlets sparkled with the lightest frost—and the bright cold blue of the sky seemed an atmosphere wherein healthy energy and cheerful self-help must flourish. She stood awhile drinking in all this beauty in an unusually pleasant frame of mind when she was disturbed by the opening of the door at the further end of the room, while Miss Grantham's voice said, 'We shall find

her here.' That lady entered, saying, 'I have brought a stern and incorruptible critic to inspect our work, Miss Grey.' A tall, thin, dark man followed her leisurely—could Maggie believe her eyes! —Yes! it was Mr Trafford!

Mr Trafford, a little less embrowned and healthy-looking than when Maggie met him in the Park; but as grave, almost stern, as he always looked when neither speaking nor smiling.

Maggie stood quite still—too astonished to think—but Trafford came forward at once with complete composure, and taking the hand she mechanically held out, said, 'Very glad to see you, Miss Grey! Had no idea I should find you at Grantham!'

'How!—What!—is it possible you know Geoffrey, Mr Trafford? Where on earth did you meet each other! Why did you not tell me you knew him, Miss Grey?' cried the heiress infinitely surprised.

'I never thought of it,' returned Maggie in all sincerity. 'I never imagined you knew Mr Trafford.'

'I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Grey at the house of the renowned Mrs Berry—where Torchester introduced me!'

'And did you know Torchester too?' asked Miss Grantham, still astonished.

'Oh, yes,' replied Maggie, growing more collected,—'that is, I used to see them both at Mrs Berry's.'

'And you so often talked of that Mrs Berry! It is curious you should never have mentioned Mr Trafford or Lord Torchester.'

'Shows the small impression either made upon you,' said Trafford, laughing. 'To think of you two ladies having been shut up here for—how long? six weeks—together, and having, no doubt, discussed all the male creatures of your acquaintance, without once remembering that Torchester or myself existed! It is really a lesson in humility!'

'Of which you are much in need,' returned Miss Grantham. 'Well! I expect Torchester, and, I think, the Countess, next week —so you can renew your acquaintance, Miss Grey.' Looking sharply, though good-humouredly at her, and Maggie was infinitely annoyed to feel herself blush. 'You know,' continued Miss Grantham, 'Torchester and I are cousins, second or first, once removed —which is it, Geoff?'

'Cannot tell! I only know that you are my first cousin one degree nearer,' said Trafford smiling; and Maggie was foolish

enough to fancy he was watching her, as she sat opposite to Miss Grantham and himself.

'Nonsense! You are no relation of mine, you know; only I am good enough to consider you'——

'A right trusty and right entirely beloved cousin,' put in Trafford coolly.

'You may confer what titles you like on yourself. Pray remember they are not ratified,' replied Miss Grantham gaily.

'A cousin is a very charming relation, is it not so, Miss Grey?' said Trafford mischievously, as Maggie thought, bringing the quick blushes to her cheek, which caught Miss Grantham's attention, as he intended them to do.

'Is Miss Grey especially aware of its charm?' she asked.

'I suppose it is no treachery to say that I saw you one morning in the Park just before I went to St Petersburg, holding close converse with a certain Cousin John, who was rather a hero in your eyes.'

'Not at all,' said Maggie, stoutly, and nettled by what she considered his somewhat heartless chaff. 'Cousin John is my best and truest friend.'

'Well caught,' cried Miss Grantham. 'You see,' to Maggie, 'how misplaced your confidence has been. You must not let this *un*trustworthy kinsman of mine into any more of your secrets.'

'And now tell me,' said Trafford, looking round, 'what are the plots which you hatch in this very enviable retreat. You have made wonderful improvements, I must say, in the old school-room.'

'I have taken it into my head to write,' said Miss Grantham with a slight hesitation, that struck Maggie as a wonderful admission of Trafford's influence.

'To write,' repeated that gentleman. 'Not letters, for I am told it is almost impossible to get a reply from you.'

'A decided calumny. No! I have sketched out the plot of a story, and with Miss Grey's help I am writing it *in extenso*. You must look at it, Geoff.'

'Certainly; but I am no fit judge. I seldom read novels Sometimes I am caught by a delightful fragment in a magazine, and blaze up into the fiercest interest, bestow maledictions on the delay which the intervening month creates, but am burnt out by the time it expires, and so lose the thread. What's your style, foreign or domestic?'

'Oh, domestic; I know very little beyond England.'

'And not much of that, eh, Marguerite des Marguerites?'

'I am not quite so ignorant and uncultivated as you fancy.'

'*Belle cousine!* you misinterpret me; and what about your heroine, dark or fair?'

'Oh, fair!' cried Maggie, 'and such a charming creature.'

'I am glad she is fair,' said Trafford, gravely. 'I have come to the conclusion that fair women have much more *diablerie* than dark ones, and a woman without *diablerie*, what my Persian friends call *nemik*, or salt, is not *worth* her salt.'

The cloud that had for a moment rested on Miss Grantham's brow was gone, and she was again radiant. 'Shall I read you a chapter or two, Geoff?' she said.

'No, thank you,' decidedly. 'I should be incapable of that strict and impartial criticism which I intend to bestow upon your lucubrations were I subjected to such a corrupting influence. No, let me have the composition in the stern solitude of my own room; there, with the help of a mild cheroot'——

'Certainly not,' cried Miss Grantham. 'What, smoke over the pages Miss Grey has written so beautifully!'

'Very well, if you will take the consequences of depriving me of the soothing weed.'

'What will you do then?' asked the hostess. 'There are guns and preserves, both sadly neglected, I fear.'

'Well, I'll have a try,' said Trafford, rising. 'Fortunately I have brought my own gun—a neglected breech-loader is much more formidable than neglected preserves.' And Trafford left the room, followed by Miss Grantham.

'We lunch at two, Geoff,' said the beautiful *châtelaine*, as she stood in the hall to see him put on his shot-belt; 'you must try and be back in time.'

'*Sans faute*,' said Trafford, buttoning his shooting-jacket. 'And after? Do you never ride now? Might we not have a canter somewhere?'

'It is nearly two months since I was on horseback; but I will see what is available. Wheeler, tell Andrews I want him. It is so dull to ride alone. With you for a cavalier it is quite different. By-the-by, Geoff, it is very odd you never noticed Miss Grey's name—and I have talked so much of her.'

'Yes, as the most admirable secretary in the world; but I am not sure you mentioned her name, or if you did, I did not notice

it, or supposed there was more than one Miss Grey in the world.'

'I suppose you did, for I have *often* mentioned her name.'

'Very likely,' with much indifference, as he examined his gun, 'so good-bye till luncheon.' And Trafford raised his hat to his cousin and descended the steps.

Miss Grantham looked after him, and stood in deep thought by the large table in the hall, till roused by the approach of the head groom, with whom she held counsel.

'It is the most curious *contretemps*, your meeting Geoff Trafford,' said Miss Grantham, again seating herself before the fire in her study, 'and having known him and Torchester; do tell me all about it.'

'There is very little to tell. Some French friends of Mrs Berry's brought Lord Torchester to one of her receptions (she received every Wednesday), and then he came very often; and when Mr Trafford came to Paris, Lord Torchester brought him.'

'And used *he* to go often?' asked Miss Grantham curiously.

'Yes, rather often; not so often as his cousin.'

'What could have induced Geoffrey to go often to such a person as you describe this Mrs Berry to be? You know he is a little eccentric, but in his way extremely fastidious. Was she handsome, this madame—what is her name now?'

'De Bragance. She was rather good-looking. But oh, Mr Trafford would not look at her,' cried Maggie, unguardedly, and immediately longed to retract her words, for Miss Grantham looked up steadily at her, and said sharply,

'Whom did he look at? What in the world took him there?'

'I really scarcely know; but, you see, the men Mrs Berry knew were, I imagine, gamblers. And I always thought Mr Trafford came to take care of Lord Torchester and keep him out of mischief,' returned poor Maggie, instinctively fencing off these agonising queries, yet striving hard to tell the truth.

'Ah!' said Miss Grantham, 'that is very likely, and accounts for Lady Torchester sounding Geoff's praises so much when he returned from Paris.' Then she remained silent for a while, her great blue eyes gazing into the fire.

'And what do you think of Mr Trafford?' she asked, abruptly. 'Do you think him handsome?'

'No, not handsome; nice-looking.'

'My dear Miss Grey, what a description of Geoff Trafford!

Nice! Why, he looks like Brian de Bois-Guilbert, or Ernest Maltravers. Well, but he is agreeable—clever.'

'Oh, yes, very; but I saw more of Lord Torchester.'

'Torchester! Oh, he is a great, shy, stupid booby.'

'There is more in him than you think,' cried Maggie, thankful to lead Miss Grantham away from the topic that so evidently interested her. 'And he was so good to me, that I shall always remember him with pleasure. You know,' she went on, rapidly, 'my position with Mrs Berry was very undefined, and she was so different from you; kind in her way, but considered me as a sort of servant, and sometimes treated me like one. When she saw Lord Torchester's kindness and consideration for me—why, I rose considerably in her estimation.'

'I suppose Torchester has the instincts of a gentleman,' said Miss Grantham; 'and perhaps more *savoir-faire* than we give him credit for,' laughing gaily. 'You may as well make a clean breast of it, for I shall find out everything from that traitor Geoff. It was too bad, his betrayal of your *tendresse* for your cousin John.'

'I have no *tendresse* for him,' said Maggie, carelessly. 'He is a good friend—that is all.'

'It is quite amusing. I cannot help picturing Geoff Trafford at Mrs Berry's. What used he to do there?'

'Oh—he talked—and he listened to the music—and he played cards—like every one else.'

'What a dreadful place for you, poor child, amongst a set of gamblers! Really, with your experience, you ought to supply some thrilling chapters to my book. But, come, I am going to ride, after luncheon, with Mr Trafford, and I want to try on my habit and hat. I had a new mourning turn-out from town, but I have never put them on.'

A delightful hour ensued. The hat was all that could be desired; but the habit required what Cécile termed '*une nuance*' of alteration, and she devoted herself to it at once.

'Lady Torchester and papa were first cousins,' said Miss Grantham, strolling back with the secretary to her apartments. 'My name, you know, was Wallscourt. Mamma was poor Lord Grantham's only child. I imagine he was not pleased at her marrying papa, who was only a captain in the Guards; but so handsome and charming. I was very fond of papa; but I do not remember my mother. While papa lived I used to be a great deal with Lady Torchester at Mount Trafford, and very doleful it was, except

when Geoffrey was there. Tor and I used to long for him to come. You know Geoff is the son of the late earl's only brother; so he is not really any relation of mine.'

'Yes,' said Maggie. 'And when your father died?'

'Oh, then grandpapa would hardly let me out of his sight; in short, I was rather sacrificed to his whims. And here, too, Geoffrey and Torchester were quite at home. So they are like brothers to me; all the pleasure I have ever known is connected with them. When grandpapa died, I was obliged to take his name. He directed it in his will. So I am Margaret Grantham Wallscourt Grantham. Of course I drop the first Grantham; it sounds ridiculous, like Clara Vere de Vere. But I must not neglect poor Mr Bolton. He came down with us yesterday. He is the family lawyer—quite an institution. Not the man you travelled with; a different class of person altogether. He was ill with the gout then, and could not come. So, adieu till luncheon time.'

And Maggie was left alone with her thoughts, which began to be a little more distinct after the shock and surprise she had received.

To be actually under the same roof with Trafford! To see him and hear his voice every day, or nearly every day. Oh! be it folly—or madness—or want of dignity—or what it might, it was a blest gleam of joy that seemed to lift up the curtains of her soul.

And then, with the distance between them more visible and clearly defined than ever, she would surely learn to regard him as a kind, pleasant friend. But she must be very careful never to let him, or any one else, suspect that she gave him a thought—that she was such an unguarded, immodest girl—so she called herself—as to care so very much for one who was simply kind to her. For all these dreams and fancies respecting his looks and tones, which had nearly overturned her reason in Paris with a mingled terror and delight that she could never, never forget—they were but dreams; he thought only of her as an honest little bread-winner, whom he would like to help.

'And I, why should I not be true myself, and accept him as a kind patron, respecting him too much to suppose for an instant he would think of me in any way that he would be ashamed to avow?'

Maggie felt quite strengthened by these profound reflections; and so, feeling sure of her own prudence and common sense, she might surely permit herself to be happy. Miss Grantham was so kind; and Grantham was such a delightful place. It was altogether

such a charming episode in her life, that she was naturally inclined to enjoy it to the full.

She therefore brushed her hair, and arranged her simple black silk dress—her best, alas!—and she felt obliged to wear it every day, in compliment to the mourning of the household; and otherwise prepared herself for the delightful, though awful, ordeal of luncheon.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MAGGIE was fortunate in descending the stairs as the trio from the drawing-room crossed the hall.

'Just in time, Miss Grey,' said Miss Grantham, as she followed Lady Dormer, who was leaning on the arm of a stout, square, elderly gentleman, with twinkling black eyes and a short throat.

'Glad to see you, Miss Grey,' said Lady Dormer, with a kind little nod. 'Miss Grey—Mr Bolton,' said the hostess. 'Wheeler, has Mr Trafford returned?'

'Yes 'm. Just come in.'

'Do you never take a gun now, Mr Bolton?'

'No, my dear lady,' in a rich, slightly choky voice. 'I am quite content to eat the spoil of other people's.'

'If I remember right, you used to shoot—when I was a little girl, I mean.'

'I have had moments of folly,' Mr Bolton was beginning, when Mr Trafford came in and took his place beside Maggie, and on Miss Grantham's right. He was immediately waited on by the three attendants with a subdued ardour very expressive to Maggie's observant optics.

'Well, Mr Trafford, any sport?' asked Lady Dormer.

'Nothing startling—two brace and a half. I assure you, Margaret, your preserves are fearfully poached; and I suspect will be, till you turn sportswoman yourself. I wonder you don't. You have tried nearly everything. Why not a gun?'

'Nonsense. But I am vexed that Hood and his men are so careless. You must row them for me, Geoff.'

Maggie fancied she observed a triumphant sort of twinkle in Mr Bolton's eyes as Miss Grantham spoke.

'What have you been about? Perpetrated a murder or two, or made the virtuous hero whop the bad one?'

'Really, Geoffrey, your expressions are painfully low.'

'You must know, Bolton,' continued Trafford, 'that Miss Grantham—'

'Pray, pray remember it is a secret!' cried that lady a little eagerly. 'Do not be a traitor both to Miss Grey and myself.'

'Oh! if it is a secret, that alters the case. Bolton shall not hear a word from me, not even if he tried, with the diabolical art of his profession, to bribe me.'

'Really, Mr Bolton,' said Lady Dormer, apologetically, 'young people indulge in strange language now-a-days.'

Miss Grantham laughed heartily, and Maggie joined. At the once familiar sound of her frank sweet laughter Trafford turned and offered her some grapes which stood before him, observing that 'hunger and exercise had made him oblivious of every one's wants but his own. It is a splendid day, Margaret,' he continued. 'Frost not too hard. We ought to start as soon as you can dress, and we may be able to get round through Southam before it is dark.'

'Very well. Oh, by the way, I had a letter from poor dear Lady Brockhurst this morning. She writes in miserable spirits from Paris. Lord Brockhurst had just started for Algeria with his brother and a Doctor somebody. She is obliged to return on account of the boys' holidays, and will be at Southam next week. So much the better for me. But she seems terribly cut up.'

'Hum!' said Trafford. 'If she stays against her will, it is a new *rôle* for the fair viscountess. I suspect she considers poor Brockhurst a good riddance.'

'What an ill-natured censorious creature you are, Geoffrey,' cried Miss Grantham, rising. 'Lady Dormer—Mr Bolton, if you will excuse me, I will go and dress.'

'May I come with you?' said Maggie, in a low tone.

'Yes, certainly,' in the most gracious voice; and they left the room.

'Well, Mr Trafford, if you and Mr Bolton will excuse *me*, I will go to the drawing-room; it is warmer.'

Trafford and Bolton rose as her ladyship withdrew. Trafford nodded to the butler in token of dismissal. The two gentlemen were alone.

'Who is that quiet girl with the soft eyes and pleasant smile?' asked Bolton.

'That quiet girl with the soft eyes, as you discriminatingly remark,' said Trafford, pouring out a bumper of sherry, and then looking straight at his companion, 'is the young lady who objected to be Countess of Torchester.'

'The deuce she is! How, in Heaven's name, does she come here?'

'Answered Miss Grantham's advertisement for a secretary, and promises to be *l'enfant gâté* of the establishment.'

'Secretary! What does she want with a secretary?'

'Literary undertakings of some magnitude.'

'Literary bosh! It is frightful to think of this noble property being in the hands of a fanciful inexperienced girl. She really ought to marry, Mr Trafford.'

'Why don't you tell her so? You have rather more influence with her than most people.'

'I fancy advice or suggestions, especially on *such* a subject, would be most acceptable from yourself. Really, Mr Trafford, it is impious to throw aside the fortune that seems to court you.'

'Court me! Pooh, Bolton! that is putting it rather strong.' And Trafford's brow dropped rather sternly, which the careful man of business observing, he steered deftly away a point or two.

'Rather awkward, will it not be, when Lady Torchester and the Earl come?'

'Yes; and by Jove, my aunt will think I placed Miss Grey here,' cried Trafford, with a sudden recollection of his intercession with the Countess, and speaking without thought.

'Why should she take up so extraordinary an idea?' asked Mr Bolton suspiciously; while Trafford cursed his own heedlessness.

'Oh! Lady Torchester was anxious to do something for Miss Grey, to show that she was pleased with her; and as I saw the poor girl was not very happily placed, I suggested that the Countess should write to her. She did, and Miss Grey never got the letter, so there was an end of it; and that's all. Pass the sherry, Bolton.'

'Hum!' said the sage. 'It's all very queer; and it will be uncommonly awkward. Could you suggest to Miss Grantham—'

'I will suggest nothing. And if you ever catch me meddling in any one's affairs—amorous or otherwise—you have my permission to put me in the parish stocks.'

'Are you ready, Geoff?' said Miss Grantham, opening the dining-room door. Trafford rose very readily.

'And what are you going to do, Mr Bolton?' continued the hostess. 'Perhaps you would have come with Geoff and me if I had thought of it in time?'

'Indeed I should not, my dear young lady,' said the old lawyer, with an exceedingly knowing smile. 'Even in Lincoln's Inn we are aware that two are company and three are not.'

Miss Grantham laughed and blushed, and frowned slightly. 'What will you do then? Drive with Lady Dormer?'

'No, I am much obliged to you. I have work enough cut out in the library to fill up my time.'

'Nevertheless, Mr Bolton, your visit to Grantham must not be all work.'

'Even that couldn't turn Bolton into a dull old boy,' said Trafford, gaily. 'Come, Miss Grantham, your steed and your humble servant wait.'

Maggie had descended, by her mistress's invitation, to see her mount. 'Now if you want assistance in your notes and queries, continued Trafford to the lawyer, 'ask Miss Grey to help you; our gracious hostess gives her a high character for skill and diligence.'

'Yes, really, Mr Bolton,' said Miss Grantham, as she laid her hand on Trafford's shoulder to mount, 'Miss Grey is the most perfect secretary in the world;' and Miss Grantham sprang lightly to her saddle.

'Much too perfect to be wasted on me,' said Mr Bolton, with an echo as of a growl in his voice. Maggie felt foolishly hurt at this rejection, and a little healthy stinging shoot of dislike put forth a germ in her heart.

'Dispose of yourselves as you will,' said Miss Grantham pleasantly, and rode away. Trafford's horse, fresher and not so well tempered as his companion, pranced and tried to bolt, but was soon reduced to order; his rider smiled a kindly smile, and waved his hand to the quiet slender figure standing on the steps, and looking wistfully after them; so the equestrians passed out of sight.

Mr Bolton made Maggie rather a grand bow, and stood aside to let her pass. After a moment's hesitation she went to Lady

Dormer in the drawing-room, and found that excellent lady absolutely on her legs (to speak irreverently).

'Would you like to drive with me, Miss Grey? I am going now.'

'Yes, very much, thank you.'

'Then put on your bonnet; it is a lovely day.'

Lady Dormer made some praiseworthy attempts at conversation during their tranquil drive, but on the whole Maggie had ample time for undisturbed reflection. And she thought very intensely of what was before her in the impending domestication with Lord Torchester and his mother.

'I should not mind him so much as her, but she will be vexed to find me here, and afraid of Lord Torchester taking a fancy to me again. And then my having left her letter unanswered! I wish they were not coming! And Miss Grantham, I do not think she would like the idea of Lord Torchester's whim about me. I wish I could go away somewhere.'

Yet in her heart she was glad she could not, though Grantham was wonderfully changed from the day before. There was no longer the sort of tranquillising hope, the consciousness of rest. No; there was instead a feverish mingling of dread and pleasure, which yet she did not like to resign. And Miss Grantham; inexperienced as she was, Maggie could not help thinking that Trafford possessed all the requirements which the beautiful heiress had declared essential in a husband.

'I am afraid she loves him. Afraid—why? Because, whispered her inner convictions, I do not think he loves her; but he will, he must! she is so fair and kind and generous.'

At this point of her meditations Lady Dormer exclaimed,

'I think that must be Miss Grantham and Mr Trafford before us.'

Maggie looked ahead and recognised the equestrians. They were proceeding leisurely at a foot pace, evidently in deep conversation, for Trafford's hand was on the crest of his companion's horse, and his face was turned towards her. They drew up to let the carriage pass, Lady Dormer inquired if they had had a pleasant ride, and if they were on their way back.

'We have had the most charming gallop over Southam Park, returned Miss Grantham, who looked radiantly handsome; and we shall return by the Bridge and Hartley End.'

'Why,' cried Lady Dormer in some dismay, 'you will not be back till dark!'

'Well, both Geoff and I know the country,' returned Miss Grantham carelessly; then to Maggie, 'So you left poor Mr Bolton all alone, Miss Grey?'

'He did not want me,' replied Maggie, laughing, 'and Lady Dormer was good enough to say she did.'

The carriage rolled on, and in due course set down its freight considerably the fresher for their airing—Lady Dormer inviting Maggie to partake of afternoon tea with her, and in her own mind pronouncing her to be a remarkably nice, well-bred, unobtrusive young person. Maggie was glad to escape as soon as she could from her ladyship's tea, and the threatened elucidation of another pattern, to her room, in order to fasten black ribbon bows on her white dress, for Miss Grantham had said, 'I shall send for you this evening.'

And Maggie was sent for, and found the heiress and her friends sipping their tea and coffee in another and a superb room, as it seemed to the little secretary. It was brilliantly lit by a large chandelier full of wax lights, and contained a grand piano, a harp, and some music stands.

Miss Grantham explained that Miss Grey was going to try over some songs with her, but they were not accustomed to each other, &c. And then song after song succeeded. Mr Bolton, who had almost as keen an appreciation of music as of claret and old port, listened and applauded heartily. Trafford lay back in an easy-chair, from which he could see the performers if he chose to look, but his eyes seemed wholly or half closed, and he was so still that he looked more like a recumbent lay figure than a living man.

'Now Geoff! are you asleep?' asked Miss Grantham a little impatiently, after she had sung a *Schlummerlied.*

'No, no,' said he; 'only delightfully comfortable; pray go on.' When it was over Mr Bolton condescended to remark that Miss Grey accompanied very fairly; while Trafford said, 'Rather more grateful work than running after Mrs Berry's "rapid acts"?—for I can think of no other term—eh, Miss Grey?'

'Much more,' said Maggie. 'I fancy if Miss Grantham allows me to accompany her I must succeed by-and-by, it is so delightful to me.'

'You have improved marvellously,' said Trafford to his cousin, 'but it is a long time since you and I spent an evening at Grantham together.'

Miss Grantham said something in a low voice, and as Trafford bent to hear it, Maggie discreetly turned away, and began to talk

to Bolton, who appeared much more approachable than in the morning, though she could not help thinking his little twinkling eyes very searching.

Two more days passed very like the one just described. Miss Grantham was scarcely five minutes at a time anywhere, but on horseback—and Maggie went down regularly each evening to the music-room.

She scarce exchanged a word with Trafford, yet he never quite let her feel she was overlooked or neglected. He was rather silent, and accepted court from, rather than offered it to, his cousin. Indeed, Maggie thought that she, even as simple, humble Maggie Grey, would have exacted more homage. 'But they are related and understand each other, for it is impossible he can be indifferent; but he seems changed, he is not like the Mr Trafford who danced with me at the ball.'

'Miss Grey,' said the mistress of the mansion, walking into her room one morning. 'I want you to come over to Castleford with me immediately after breakfast. Geoffrey has absolutely persuaded Mr Bolton to venture into the preserves, and I have a special errand to Castleford; pray wrap up, for it is very cold.'

Trafford and Mr Bolton were waiting to hand the ladies into Miss Grantham's special equipage.

'An early start! May I ask the object?' said the former.

'Mysteries of shopping beyond your comprehension.'

'Then are there shops in Castleford?'

'What disgraceful ignorance,' said Bolton.

'Mr Trafford is so provoking,' said the fair charioteer, after having driven a little way in silence.

'Is he?' asked her companion.

'Yes, he is so indolent and apathetic. Mr Bolton and I almost quarrelled with him at breakfast. He might be anything or do anything, but he won't. He ought to be in Parliament.' A long pause.

'Miss Grey, do you know I am going into Castleford on your account?'

'On my account! How can that be?'

'Promise to take what I am going to say in good part, and not to be unkind or disagreeable.'

'Unkind—me—to you? Impossible, in every way.'

'Well, I have noticed that you very considerately wear black since you came down here, and I thought that as you are not

wearing black on your own account you would not mind accepting a couple of dresses from me. We are on the way to order them.'

'Miss Grantham! you are only too kind and considerate. I never dreamed of such a thing. If you really wish to give them to me I shall of course accept them as frankly as they are offered. But ought you not to wait and see if you continue'——

'What should I wait for? I am only so glad you are pleased and do not try to do the grand. Poor dear Miss Colby would have made me a speech a yard long; by-the-by, I must write to her, but I seem never to have time for anything. Really to-morrow we must do something to the story, and on Tuesday the Torchesters will be here, and then Christmas.'

'Yet it seems such a pity not to finish your story.'

'Well, we must see about it. You never saw Lady Torchester?'

'Never.'

'She is not handsome, but then she is very good. Tremendously religious, and so fond of those wretched Low Church clergymen, who look like Dissenters—so different from our rector.' And Miss Grantham talked pleasantly at intervals till they reached the little town of Castleford, which was in its way a flourishing place. The grandest shop in the principal street was Miss Moody's, where the wealthy farmers' daughters thought fashion itself lay enshrined.

'What an awful name!' said Miss Grantham, laughing, as she drew up at the door. 'She ought to change it to Mademoiselle Modiste.'

The lady of Grantham was received with the most profound deference, the most obsequious attention, and to do her justice she gave no unnecessary trouble. A rich black silk was quickly chosen and ordered to be made up, and then a thin black gauze or grenadine was picked out, and some special directions given as to its being somewhat elaborately fashioned as a demi-toilette dress. 'Mind, Miss Moody, they must both be finished and ready for my messenger by eight o'clock on Monday evening.'

'Indeed, madam, this is a very busy time, and I almost fear'——

'Oh nonsense! If you cannot promise them on Monday we shall retract the order and send to town for them. Come, you must promise them on Monday and fulfil your promise.'

'Well 'm, rather than disoblige you in any way I will put aside other work. And though this is always a busy time it will not be quite so busy as usual, on account of poor Mr Burge's sad illness.'

'Why! what is the matter with him?' asked Miss Grantham,

who was examining some bonnets with more curiosity than admiration.

'Some say apoplexy, and others congestion of the brain; but he fell quite sudden at the Town 'All on Saturday, and they say has not spoken since.'

'I am sorry to hear it,' returned the heiress thoughtfully. 'Lord Grantham had a great regard for him. Make haste and fit on Miss Grey's dress for I must drive round and inquire for him before we go back.'

'This Mr Burge is the mayor and member for the town. I think he was a tanner—a very clever man. He sometimes came to dine at Grantham. I must call,' said Miss Grantham, and fell into a fit of musing which lasted till she had made her inquiries at Riversdale, a very pretty but highly tutored place on the outskirts of the town. The replies were not very encouraging. Mr Burge had been attacked with congestion of the brain. Sir Savill Row had been telegraphed for and had given hopes of his restoration. Miss Grantham was exceedingly silent all the way back, but when about half way across the park she exclaimed: 'I have been meditating a grand scheme; perhaps I shall tell you some day. When you take off your bonnet come into the study; I think I shall want you there.'

As soon as she entered the hall Miss Grantham asked, Has Mr Bolton come in?'

'Yes, 'm, some time ago.'

'Ask him to come to me in the library,' said she, and walked away in the direction of that apartment.

Meantime Trafford had returned to the house with Mr Bolton, who speedily discovered that the cold struck to his feet and would bring on gout. Finding no one in the drawing-room but Lady Dormer, dozing over her crochet, Trafford retired to his own room, and sitting down to his writing-table, wrote the day of the month rather slowly at the top of a sheet of note paper, and a little lower down, 'My dear Lady Torchester.' Then he leant back and thought for a while in a desultory manner.

It was curious that his suspicions, roused by Miss Grantham's description of her delightful secretary, should have been verified —and that Maggie Grey should be domiciled under the same roof with him; curious, too, that she should have answered Miss Grantham's advertisement. Had she then rejected the ourang of a cousin? It was impossible she could ever have thought seriously

of him. Yet certainly she had a tender recollection of him in Paris. Paris!—what an idiot he had made of himself there! Nevertheless what pleasant hours he had spent in that cool shady *salon* of Mrs Berry's! From his soul he wished himself back there with no thought for the morrow. It was strange how well that simple humbly-born little Maggie stood the contrast with her splendid patroness. 'What is it in that girl that makes her an individual everywhere—herself always? But I had better write and tell Lady Torchester she is here. I wish I could speak a word or two first with Maggie—Miss Grey—and by Jove!' looking up out of the window which commanded the approach, 'there come the white ponies. I'll go down to the study, ask for the precious MS., and try my luck.'

When Maggie came into the room a few minutes after she found Mr Trafford standing in one of the windows. She was quite composed, for the strange prescience with which she seemed gifted regarding him told her she would find him there.

'What have you done with Miss Grantham?'

'She has gone to talk to Mr Bolton in the library.'

'I was greatly surprised to find you here, Miss Grey,' said Trafford taking his stand on the hearth-rug, as Maggie sat down by the large writing-table.

'I suppose you were.'

'I supposed a very different destiny for you,' looking intently at her; but she did not raise her eyes. 'Forgive me,' he went on, 'if I use the privilege of an old acquaintance; are you happy here—happier than with Mrs Berry?'

'I am not quite sure,' returned Maggie, answering with a fuller truth than she spoke, even to her own heart, raising her eyes and looking straight into his. 'Miss Grantham is so kind and generous and beautiful,' she went on with enthusiasm, 'it is delightful to be with her; but poor Mrs Berry, she was my first friend. I knew I was useful, almost essential to her, and equality is a grand ingredient in friendship, affection, everything.'

'Is it?' said Trafford mechanically, as she paused, for he was thinking of her eyes. They were not great blue orbs—that challenged instant admiration, like Miss Grantham's; they were merely grey, darkly fringed and full, generally very quiet restful eyes; but once they began to speak their own language to you you could not help feeling curious as to what they would say next. At this

moment there was an earnest outlook in them as if she was thinking of her past more than her interlocutor.

'Now you know I cannot be of the smallest *real* use to Miss Grantham, but it is a great pleasure and advantage to be with her, and I consider it a wonderful piece of good fortune to have found her; so I will just try and enjoy the sunshine while I have it. Is that not true wisdom. Mr Trafford?'—with a frank smile.

'Excellent philosophy. I always thought you a philosopher, Miss Grey.' A slightly awkward pause, during which Trafford meditated how he could best introduce the Torchester topic, and not finding a way, exclaimed, 'I suppose you have quite lost sight of that old Red Republican you secluded, *au cinquième?*'

'Oh yes, quite, I am afraid,' with a sad little smile. 'Poor Monsieur Duval!'

'I believe, in spite of all your enthusiasm for my charming kinswoman, you would rather read his papers to him than write her books.'

'Just think what a treasure I should be to him. And do you know, he was very lovable?'

'In what does being lovable consist? I wish you would teach me,' said Trafford, with his old smile and manner. Maggie felt a strange dull pang at her heart, but only smiled, and said, 'I do not know myself.'

'At all events,' continued Trafford in an altered tone. 'You have won Miss Grantham's heart; but you must remember that charming women have certain privileges of variability—so be prepared'——

'Miss Grantham will always be loyalty itself,' interrupted Maggie. 'But if you mean to warn me that I must not count on too long a spell of rest and sunshine, I am quite aware of it. In the first place, Miss Grantham does not really want me, and in the second she will soon marry, and then, as with Mrs Berry, my "occupation" would be "gone."' She paused for a moment to gather courage, and turning her head slightly aside, presented Trafford with the side view of her face and throat and little pink ear, which he so well remembered, went on, blushing and hesitating. 'There is one thing I wanted so much to say—to ask you about, just once. I have been quite uncomfortable ever since I heard that Lord Torchester and his mother were coming. Not about him,' she went on hastily, for without seeming to look at Trafford, she was aware

that a smile was stealing round the corners of his mouth; 'but I do dread meeting Lady Torchester, and I do particularly wish that Miss Grantham should never know anything of her cousin's nonsense about me—she would not like it, she would somehow be displeased with me, and I *do* want to rest here for a little while; so if you could just tell Lady Torchester not to say anything, I know Lord Torchester will not.'

'I shall do my best to carry out your wishes,' said Trafford gravely.

'You do not think it false or wrong in any way?' asked Maggie simply. 'You see I cannot help fancying that perhaps Miss Grantham was the young lady you once mentioned to me that Lady Torchester wishes her son to marry, and it would never do for her to know'——

'That he was your rejected suitor? Certainly not. You reason shrewdly; but may he not become your suitor again?' put in Trafford as she paused.

'Oh no!' with a sunny smile and shake of the head. 'It is not in Lord Torchester. He will never quite forgive me for the mortification. Oh, I am not the least afraid of that!'

'And are you still quite content to have thrown over an earl and his rent-roll?'

'Quite, quite,' said Maggie, leaning her elbows on the table and resting her chin on her clasped hands. 'I have read that some wise old Greek used to write about the "fitness of things," and I am sure I am not at all fit to be a countess.'

Trafford was too much occupied in observing the quiet grace of her attitude to reply. There was a something of sadness and resignation in it, but not the slightest tinge of an appeal for pity.

'No,' she continued, for she became more at ease while she talked, 'all that is quite out of the question; but if you will tell Lady Torchester that Miss Grantham has no idea—that I am so anxious it should not be known, I should be so much obliged; it would secure me a little longer the quiet, the strengthening, of such a resting-place as this before I drift away to sea again. Not that I fear doing so,' she added hastily, half frightened, half resentful at the look of tenderness and compassion that melted Trafford's dark eyes into unusual softness. 'To bear is to conquer one's fate, you know,' she added almost gaily.

'I feel quite sure your destiny is to "conquer,"' replied Trafford, looking steadily away from her, for he felt he dared not trust his

eyes. 'But so far as the Torchester question is concerned, you may consider it settled; and if at any time there is anything else I can do for you, pray let me know.'

'Thank you very much. It is not likely—what a long time Miss Grantham is with Mr Bolton! I am sure the luncheon bell must have rung.'

'And I must go,' said Trafford regretfully. 'By the way, I came to ask you for some of the novel; can you give me a specimen?'

'Certainly. Here are three chapters.'

'Thank you,' said Trafford, taking them; yet he lingered. 'Does your cousin, Mr John Grey, return soon to—Africa, Australia, wherever he came from?—or perhaps he has returned?'

'He does not go back till next spring.'

'Oh, indeed! Very delightful to meet an old friend and champion again.'

'Very,' said Maggie with a sigh. After a moment's hesitation Trafford left the room, and Maggie immediately flew to her own.

The letter to Lady Torchester was finished in time for post. It was remarkably candid in tone. After a few preliminaries, he continued thus: 'Fancy my astonishment at finding Tor's "young lady," Miss Grey, established here as secretary to our fair princess. We were equally surprised to see each other, as she had no idea that the houses of Torchester and Grantham were connected. I find she is greatly alarmed at the idea of encountering you, and equally fearful lest Margaret should discover your son's episode concerning her. I have therefore promised and vowed three things in your name. First, that you would not say a word respecting Torchester's temporary insanity; secondly, that you would be graciously pleased to accept the expression of her regret that she was, though unconsciously, the means of causing you temporary annoyance; and third, that you would be so good as to understand that the letter you had the kindness to write never reached her, and allow her to explain the same. Now, my dear aunt, I think you are bound to believe and do as I have promised for you. It is also the wisest course; and I fancy I have penetrated the secret of my young *protégée's* disinterested refusal of your son. She has been long attached and is now, I fancy, engaged to a cousin of her own, who is going out to the colonies somewhere, and she has probably taken the place of secretary here while waiting her intended's summons.'

'There,' said Trafford to himself, 'I hope and believe this last piece of intelligence is an utter falsehood. Still I have every right to come to such a conclusion, nor am I bound to give the Countess the light of my inner consciousness.'

A few gossiping lines to the same effect were directed to Lord Torchester, and Geoffrey went to luncheon with a lighter spirit.

The first moment Maggie could speak to Miss Grantham alone was in the drawing-room after dinner.

'Mr Trafford came to the study to-day while I was waiting for you, and asked for some of your manuscript. I suppose I was not wrong in giving it to him?'

'Oh, no. I am rather pleased he took the trouble, but you will see how he will cut it up. He does not believe in anything I do, said Miss Grantham with an impatient, petulant gesture.

'That is impossible,' replied Maggie gravely. 'But perhaps,' smiling, 'he wants you to be perfection.'

'He had better by far be satisfied with what I am,' said Miss Grantham haughtily: and then the object of their discussion joined them.

'So you are really reading my novel, Geoff? What do you think of it?' asked Miss Grantham in a careless manner; but Maggie could detect a suppressed anxiety in her voice.

'I shall not commit myself to any opinion till I have perused it with profound attention. The day after to-morrow I may pronounce judgment.'

'Well, be sure you give me your real opinion, and be serious about it.'

'Am I not always sober and serious?—melancholy with the weight of do-nothingness on my shoulders? Do you know, some old fellow-travellers of mine are talking of an expedition to search for the sources of the Nile, and I am strongly inclined to join them? I dare say, Miss Grey, your relative could give me some hints as to African travelling?'

'Perhaps so. He once went with some exploring party to look for diamonds.'

'And found none, or I am sure you would be sparkling with them.'

'Really, Geoffrey, there is plenty of work to be done at home if you would allow Mr Bolton and me to cut it out for you,' said Miss Grantham, rising to go into the music-room. Trafford made no answer, and as she passed the chair in which he was lounging she

repeated her words, adding, 'Do you hear me?' and laying her white hand on his shoulder.

'I do, fair queen,' said he, turning his head and kissing the long taper fingers.

Miss Grantham blushed vividly and drew her hand away very gently, while she exclaimed, 'You are the most quietly audacious man in existence,' but she spoke with a tender smile and melting glance. The whole was a complete revelation to the observant secretary, even as though both hearts were laid bare before her. The noble, beautiful heiress had given her whole soul to the plain, dark, gentleman-like kinsman, who treated her as a spoilt child, while the lazy kindliness of his caress bespoke in Maggie's estimation almost insulting indifference. What would she not give to warn her admired friend; to save her in some way from the pain and mortification she felt was before her!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE almost dreaded Tuesday came on with terrible rapidity—for Maggie was kept tolerably well occupied in writing lists respecting donations of coal and beef and blankets, which seemed to her on a scale of extraordinary magnificence. She also was constantly in attendance on Miss Grantham, who made frequent visits to those parts of Castleford which were occupied by her tenants, and showed a lively interest in their well-being. 'You see we can have no festivities at Grantham this Christmas, so I must make up for it somehow,' she explained to Maggie.

But Maggie thought what was much more deserving of explanation was the extraordinary interest taken by Mr Bolton in these benevolent proceedings, and the curiosity he evinced as to the politics of Castleford.

On Tuesday morning Maggie and Miss Grantham had been over to Castleford, and inquired, as they generally did, for Mr Burge. He was considerably better, but the doctors had recommended complete rest and change to a warmer climate. On their return,

Miss Grantham had flown away in search of Mr Bolton, passing Trafford, who met them in the hall with a nod. So he had a moment to speak to Maggie: 'I had a line from Lady Torchester, yesterday, and it is all right. Are you satisfied?'

'Quite satisfied; and oh, so much obliged to you!'

'By the way, I told Lady Torchester you had never received her letter, but that you would explain. Pray be sure to do so.'

'I will; that is, I will try—if she is not very formidable.'

'She is not, I assure you. I imagine Bolton and Miss Grantham have some secret, they are always in conclave.'

'I have guessed it, and you will know, if you only ask, I imagine,' said Maggie, laughing gaily in her relief at Trafford's intelligence, and running away up-stairs.

Trafford looked after her, 'She has come out of it unscathed,' he thought; and then the memory of the little cold trembling hand he had taken that wretched evening, when he had bid her good-bye in Paris—of the strained look of bewildered grief in those speaking eyes—came back to him, as it had often done before; for on that occasion only had Trafford caught a glimpse of Maggie's real feelings.

'Bah! it was only a feeling of her loneliness that affected her; at any rate, she was soon consoled by her polished relative in the blue satin tie! She has never denied any of my insinuations about "Cousin John." I am really sick of this place. I am in for the family gathering at Christmas; but by Heaven, as soon as that is over, I'll be off, unless, indeed, I see any signs of Torchester tormenting her—and then—we'll see.'

With no small trepidation, Maggie attired herself in her new dress, to make her appearance on the memorable Tuesday. Had it been only to meet Lord Torchester she would have been simply glad; but his mother—that was an ordeal. 'If she is cold and disdainful, it will make me miserable, at least for a little while; for if she does not turn Miss Grantham against me why need I mind? Only I do not want Mr Trafford to compassionate me, to look upon me as a pitiable object, as I fancy he does. Heigho! Oh! how I wish I could manage to fall in love with Cousin John! But it is quite, quite impossible. I wish he thought so. It is a long time since he has written.'

And then she looked very closely to the details of her dress, and viewed herself critically in the glass. The thin gauzy black looked

well over her white neck and arms, her smoothly-braided brown hair rolled up so neatly into a thick knot at the back, suited admirably the perfect outline of her head, her unpretending style.

'It is hardly worth thinking so much how I look, I shall be scarcely seen,' she thought—smiling, not unpleased, at her own reflection. 'But that does not trouble me. Yet how charming it must be to know that some one watches for you, and rejoices to see you look well. Ah what folly for me to think such things! But perhaps it may come to me some day, if I am a good girl—as the children say.'

And she stole down to the drawing-room in good time, that she might be safely landed before the ladies came from the dining-room. She sat down, on a low chair at the further end of the room from the grand fire that blazed and glowed so gorgeously, and took up a newspaper; but she could not read; she was acting over again the scenes of her life in Paris. She saw Lord Torchester come into Mrs Berry's saloon and say, 'I have come for you, Miss Grey.' What a delightful day it was at Versailles! How good Lord Torchester was! How long ago it seemed—how much older she seemed to herself now! And then that evening when Lord Torchester brought Mr Trafford to her tea-table, and she felt half angry, half frightened, at his searching grave dark eyes; but the opening door roused her, her heart beat—a tall lady in black velvet and bugles, and a snowy-looking head-dress of white *crêpe lisse*, with jet ornaments, walked in, and straight up to the fire, without seeming to see that there was any one in the room. Lady Dormer and Miss Grantham followed.

The latter turned towards her secretary. 'How nice you look!' she said quickly, in a low voice. 'The dress does admirably; come, I must introduce you.' Maggie, encouraged, though blushing vividly, followed her patroness. The Countess, still standing before the fire, was speaking slowly and emphatically to Lady Dormer, who had sunk into her usual arm-chair:

'A more conscientious and truly Christian young man, I have never met, and if Margaret would only exert her'——

'Let me present my secretary, Miss Grey, to you, Lady Torchester,' said the young hostess.

Lady Torchester made the slightest possible curtsey, and looked full into Maggie's face—but with a smile. Maggie thought that, apart from voice and manner, the Countess was rather a common-looking woman. 'I am sure my dear' she said to Miss Grantham,

'I am quite puzzled what you can possibly have for a secretary to do. That you should have Miss Grey for a companion, seems perfectly natural; but one associates a secretary with parliamentary business and blue books.'

'I am quite willing that Miss Grey should be my companion. So call her which you like'——

'There is something rather masculine and pretentious in a "secretary," do you not think so yourself, Miss Grey?'

'I am not sure; a secretary is a person who writes, and I do write for Miss Grantham.'

'And a "companion" suggests the idea of a charming victim to some Gorgon of an old maid with a vicious pug. Now Miss Grey may be ever so charming, but she is not a victim.'

'No, indeed!' cried Maggie, with a gay laugh.

Lady Torchester looked at her with some interest, and then resumed the subject from which she had diverged; this was a glowing eulogy on an admirable young curate for whom she wished to secure Miss Grantham's interest with the rector. The heiress listened wearily, glancing sometimes at the door by which the gentlemen would enter; and Maggie, taking up Lady Dormer's crochet, went on with it mechanically, while she contrived to study Lady Torchester's appearance. She was, of course, quite different from what her fancy had painted. The Countess was a large, solemn-looking woman, with a slightly wandering expression, which reminded Maggie of Lord Torchester, and conveyed the idea of being terribly in earnest; yet she did not seem cold or unkindly; rather unsympathetic from slowness of comprehension.

At last Miss Grantham rose from the sofa where she had been sitting beside the Countess, saying, 'Well, I will speak to the Dean about him, but I do not think it will do much good,' and walked into the next room.

When she was gone, Lady Torchester asked, 'What is your work, Miss Grey?' slightly moving her dress as she did so, as if inviting her to her side.

Maggie immediately accepted the invitation. 'It is Lady Dormer's, but I sometimes help her.'

'Pretty,' said Lady Torchester, carelessly, and then became silent.

Maggie nerved herself; now was the moment to speak to Lady Torchester about her letter, and have done with it. Blushing

brightly, and in a low tremulous voice, Maggie began. 'Mr Trafford told me you had been so very good as to write to me, and I have been most anxious to tell you I never received the letter. It must have come to Paris after we left, and as I never thought of any one writing to me I left no address.

'I was sorry you did not get it, but as it has turned out it was of no consequence. You could not be better placed than with Miss Grantham.'

'Oh no, indeed! She is so good and so delightful. But I should like you to know how much obliged I am to you—how'——

'I understand,' said Lady Torchester, smiling indulgently; just then the door opened, and the Earl and Mr Bolton entered together. The moment he crossed the threshold, Maggie was conscious of a change in her former admirer. He looked older, browner, more erect and assured. An expression of amused surprise came into his face when his eyes fell on his former divinity sitting quietly by his lady mother, and smiled upon by the Countess. Trafford, and a tall, large, elderly, jovial-looking man, with profuse reddish-grey moustaches and whiskers, whom Maggie had never seen before, followed.

'Miss Grey,' said the Earl, walking straight up to her and shaking hands cordially. 'I am very glad to see you. I never was more surprised than when Geoff Trafford told me you were here.' Drawing a chair beside her, Lord Torchester sat down, while the lines in his mother's face gradually contracted into an expression of watchfulness and anxiety. 'So you are Miss Grantham's secretary? What do you write about? Is she not a jolly girl?'

'How can you use such an expression?' cried Maggie, indignantly, all her old frank ease towards the Earl returning to her. 'Miss Grantham is like a young princess.'

'Well, there were lots of very jolly girls princesses at St Petersburg.'

'Not like our princess,' cried Maggie; 'I'm sure of that.'

'Miss Grey is quite right,' said the Countess, gravely. 'It is a most objectionable and inappropriate expression, and I am sure Margaret would not like it.'

'She scarcely ever likes anything I say; but I can't be dumb, for all that. Now what do you do with yourself all day?—not write letters?'

'A secretary is bound to keep the secrets of the cabinet.' said Maggie.

The Countess looked a little aghast at the easy tone of this badinage.

'Look,' said Trafford to Bolton, as they stood together, coffee-cups in hand, at the other end of the room. 'Look at Lady Torchester's face. I must take Tor off somehow.' Through the open door he saw Miss Grantham in the music-room, leaning against a high-backed chair, talking to the stout stranger. Trafford set down his cup, and coming up to the group on the sofa, said, 'Excuse me, Torchester, but Miss Grantham wants Miss Grey's assistance in the music-room.'

'Very well,' she replied, rising, rolling up her work, and carefully depositing it in Lady Dormer's basket.

Trafford offered his arm. 'I was afraid to trust you any longer,' said he. 'You must not delude Tor again.'

'There is no danger; and I was *so* glad to see him. It quite took me back to Paris—dear Paris!'

'Yet you had not your Cousin John there,' and Trafford looked down to see how she would take the thrust.

Maggie, amused and a little nettled, looked up defiantly and replied, 'No, but I had my idea of him.'

'Which has, no doubt, been amply realised,' added Trafford. But Maggie would not answer, either by lip or eyes. 'We are famishing for a song,' said Trafford, 'so I have brought Miss Grey to deprive you of the shadow of an excuse.'

'Oh! I shall be very happy; but, Colonel Molyneux, do go and ask the Countess to come. Say I want her opinion of my performance.'

The whole party were soon assembled in the music-room, and Maggie thought she observed, through all the sparring that went on between the Earl and his cousin, a decided, though suppressed, admiration on his part for the beautiful *châtelaine*. She sang unusually well, as she was always excited by the chance of fresh triumphs, for even her adoring secretary was obliged to see that the joy of her heart was to win the admiration of every man, woman, and child who approached her; and the individual who withheld that tribute was, *pro tem.*, the most important personage.

'I fear this is a great risk,' said Lady Torchester to Trafford, under cover of an eager dispute between Miss Grantham, Lord

Torchester, and the stout Colonel, as to the merits of Jenny Lind and Grisi. 'You see he was instantly attracted.'

'I think it would have been a worse symptom if he had avoided her. His ease and frankness are most reassuring, and what can't be cured, &c. Here we are, we must make the best of it,' returned Trafford.

'Of course. She is really a nice girl; perfectly ladylike. If Torchester were married I think I should not mind having her for a companion myself. Her stay with Margaret is of course uncertain; but you think it not improbable Miss Grey is herself engaged?'

'Well, I have an idea she is—only an idea; of course, Miss Grey does not make a confidant of me. I have not spoken half-a-dozen words to her since I came into the house.'

'Nevertheless, Geoffrey,' said his aunt suspiciously, 'you always seem to know more about her than any one else.'

'Intuition, I suppose,' carelessly.

'Don't you think it very wrong of Torchester to bring Colonel Molyneux down here? He is a man I have a great objection to; not even good style.'

'He is of the sounding-brass order, but not a bad sort of fellow, and I think it was a good idea of your son's, because a family party in a house without a male head, though charming in many ways, is *rather* slow.' The Countess shook her head. 'You know,' continued Trafford, 'Margaret rather took a fancy to him in Scotland.'

'And what have you done with Mrs Berry?' said Lord Torchester, who was leaning on the piano, to Maggie, who was sitting at it.

'She suddenly married Monsieur de Bragance, and has quite disappeared.'

'What, that clever scamp? Poor woman, won't he lick her? I say, Molyneux, didn't you know something of Bragance here—in London, I mean?'

'Yes, a long time ago—eight or nine years ago.'

'What was he then?'

'Why, a distinguished foreigner.'

The Colonel seemed rather reserved. Soon after Lady Torchester said she was tired, and the party broke up.

The gentlemen kept together a while longer, and the Colonel was more communicative respecting M. de Bragance than he seemed disposed to be before the ladies.

'I'll come into your room, Geoff, and have a weed, before I retire,' said the Earl. 'I want to talk to you.'

'Enter then,' returned his kinsman.

'How well Margaret Wallscourt is looking,' said Lord Torchester, after smoking a few moments in silence.

'Very well.' A pause.

'She has turned out a much finer girl than I expected; but is always the same with the tongue, so deuced ready, she takes a fellow's breath away.'

'She does rather.' Another pause.

'Still she does not mean the half she says.'

'Very likely.'

'Why, Geoff! you seem to think your words worth their weight in gold, you are so stingy of them. Don't you see I want to talk?'

'Well, talk, for heaven's sake.'

'Yes, but I want you to talk too. What have you been doing since you came down? You have been here ten days and more.'

'Not much—shooting and arguing with old Bolton, riding and talking metaphysics with our beautiful cousin.'

'Metaphysics! Making love, you mean? Well, there is no reason why you should not.'

'Perhaps so,' said Trafford, coolly; 'but I am not inclined to do it. Margaret, in my opinion, will be a more lovable woman eight or ten years hence than she is now.'

'By Jove, what a notion! Why, she will be thirty by that time.'

'It will take her that time to know herself and the life that is round her. At present she is like the juice of the grape in its first stage, with all its flavour and strength and richness in a ferment. You cannot tell what she will be; but she is a fine creature, though awfully overweighted with fortune.'

'I think she is very fond of you, Geoff?'

'She is rather, just now; she doesn't think she has reduced me to a proper state of subjection. If that could be accomplished, why I should fall rapidly in her estimation. However, I am really very fond of her.

'I thought so,' said the Earl, puffing vigorously.

'I have a fatherly regard for her, and should be most happy to bestow a paternal blessing on her union with—yourself, for instance.'

'Oh, you would! You are really not hit? Well, I am not in love with her or any one, thank God, and don't intend to be.'

'Right, most potent signor. It would hardly be decent to recover so quickly and plunge *in medias res* over again.'

'Well, I was a great ass,' said the Earl good-humouredly; 'but I was a lucky one. What a nice little thing she is,' he went on musingly. 'I mean Miss Grey. Do you know, I was so glad to see her I felt inclined to give her a kiss. She is such a sensible true-hearted brick, and stuck so gallantly to the man she liked in spite of my rank and fortune and all that.'

Trafford looked hard at the speaker, but all was honest and sincere in the expression of his frank commonplace countenance.

'What is this cousin of hers? Could one give him a lift anyhow?'

'I know nothing whatever of him. So you are perfectly reconciled to your loss, ready to resign the divine party to another's arms?'

'Yes,' said the Earl placidly, and evidently quite reconciled to Maggie by the idea that her affections had been engaged before they had met. 'I dare say though, if I had married her, I should have been tremendously fond of her; but marriages of this sort are great folly. I seem to have come to my senses from the moment she refused me. I shall never forget opening the door tonight, and seeing her and my mother talking so sweetly together. What an extraordinary chance to find her here! I hope Margaret will never know what an ass I made of myself about her. Now Margaret is one of the disinterested ones—she *must* be, she has so much of her own, eh? Nearly all the women you meet are so disgustingly greedy about rank and settlements'—— the Earl looked at Trafford inquiringly.

'Margaret may be ambitious,' he replied, choosing a fresh cigar. 'But I should say perfectly disinterested.'

'At any rate, Maggie Grey is. If one woman is, why shouldn't another?' resumed the Earl logically. 'I remember the first day I ever saw her alone—wasn't it nice! You know Mrs Berry's *salon* was so shady and cool and full of flowers?'

'Yes;' Trafford remembered it.

'Well, the first time I ever had a quiet talk with her she told me I reminded her of her Cousin John.'

'Then I wish to heaven you could see Cousin John, and you would be flattered,' said Trafford, with unusual energy.

'Why—how—have you seen him? You seem to know more of Miss Grey than I thought.'

'I was trying that chestnut Molyneux persuaded me to buy in the Park the day before we started for St Petersburg, when I met her walking with the said cousin, very lovingly, arm and arm.'

'Well?'

'She looked confused, blushed, and introduced the relative, who called me "sir."'

'The deuce he did! So you think it is all fixed?'

'I cannot possibly tell.'

'I wonder you did not mention this to me before.'

'Why, of course I thought it better not.' Another pause, and then in an altered voice Trafford asked what horses the Earl had brought, as Castleford hounds met constantly in the neighbourhood. 'I have sent for the chestnut and Prince Henry myself,' continued Trafford, 'and expect them to-morrow.' The conversation then became of horses, horsey, and the Earl grew even more animated than when the talk was on a nobler theme.

The following Saturday was Christmas Day, and the intervening time flew by with great rapidity. The lady of the house went out on two occasions to see the hounds throw off, and the gentlemen were quite animated in their evening discussions on the events in the field. Mr Bolton took a quiet ride to and fro cover with Miss Grantham, who spent some time one evening in the vain attempt to persuade her secretary to mount and ride. 'You would soon learn,' said the heiress, 'and it would be very nice for me to have a lady with me.'

'I should only be an encumbrance to you at present,' urged Maggie, dreadfully confused to find herself the centre of a group, all waiting for her decision. 'If you still wish it, and I am here in the spring, I will learn, provided the great Mr Andrews will condescend to teach me.'

'You were always shy of riding, Miss Grey,' cried Lord Torchester. 'Do you remember how I tried to persuade you in Paris?'

'Miss Grey is quite right, as I must say she generally is,' said Lady Torchester quickly. 'If you want a companion in your rides why do you not ask Alicia Longmore?'

'My dear Countess, how can you suggest such a thing! However, Lady Brockhurst will be here next week, and then I shall have an ally *par excellence*.' Lady Torchester shook her head.

As Miss Grantham was dressing for dinner the day before Christmas Day, Maggie tapped at her door.

'May I speak to you a moment?' she was a little confused, and blushing.

'Certainly, only pray don't tell me you are going away.'

'No, no; but I have had a letter from my Cousin John; he wants to come down to see me. Indeed I cannot prevent him, and I am afraid you may not like it.'

'Yes, of course, I shall. Ask him down, by all means. I will speak to nurse to look after him. Only mind, he must not take you away directly.'

'I assure you, Miss Grantham, there is no likelihood of such a thing, not the least.'

'Well, well, we will see. At any rate it will be nice for you to have one of your own people. Cecile, call nurse to me. When is your cousin coming, dear?'

And on the spot, Maggie's right royal protectress gave orders for the honourable reception of Mr John Grey, jun.

'Christmas is the time for cousins to crop up, as Geoffrey would say. Grantham Longmore arrived to day while you were out with Aunt Dormer. It is wonderful how well you get on with the old ladies. The Countess declares you the very essence of prudence and common sense—that your being sent to a castaway like myself was a direct answer to prayer; but whose, she doesn't mention. Remember, you must dine with us to-morrow. I will sing "Robert, toi que j'aime" to-night. Geoff Trafford says it is only fit for the stage.'

CHAPTER XXV.

CHRISTMAS DAY was all that Christmas Day ought to be—clear, crisp, bright. The park not buried in snow, but sparkling all over with frost, sufficiently hard to arrest the hunters' progress.

'I am going to walk to church; will you?' said Miss Grantham, coming into Maggie's room, in out-door dress.

'Yes, I should like it very much; and oh, Miss Grantham! what a beautiful writing-desk I found here this morning. I never had anything so beautiful before. And your dear kind note, I shall treasure it quite as much: but who am I to thank for this?'

And she held up a small morocco case, wherein crochet needles and scissors, a tatting shuttle, and all kinds of implements in oxidised silver, most artistically designed, lay imbedded in violet velvet.

'That is very pretty,' said Miss Grantham, taking it up and examining it lovingly.

'Who could have sent it?'

'Mr Trafford,' said Miss Grantham, still so occupied with the case that she did not see Maggie's quick delighted blush. 'He has given us all such charming things; see, I have put on my present.'

It was a gold châtelaine, of evident antiquity and considerable value. 'He said it would remind me of my duties as a housekeeper; and I showed him your writing-case. He said he fancied you were more *au fait* with the needle than the pen, and that he would send you a needle-case. It is really very nice. Geoff is a good fellow, in spite of his sneers at my theatrical singing. Put on your things, you will find me in the hall.'

Maggie hastened to comply, her heart beating very happily. Humble as she was, how kindly Mr Trafford always treated her, never failing to testify his friendship, his respect. Would she not be worse than a fool if she were not perfectly satisfied with such an amount of feeling? And then, by the time Miss Grantham and Mr Trafford were married—for to this culmination she always looked—she would have become quite accustomed to the idea, and perhaps both would remain her fast friends, and she might get rid of the awful sense of isolation that often oppressed her.

Meantime Miss Grantham walked down-stairs and found the gentlemen who were to escort her to the village church, the spire of which, seen through an opening of the woods, was one of the many points of view from the house.

Lord Torchester was talking to Mr Longmore in one of the windows about the probable duration of the frost.

'What keeps us?' asked Trafford, joining Miss Grantham, as she stood by the fire.

'Miss Grey; she will be down directly.' Trafford glanced at the two gentlemen in the window. 'They will secure their places

on the right hand and on the left, so it will be my duty to escort Maggie; that is absolutely necessary,' he thought, and had just opened his lips to say what a good idea it was to walk to church, when Miss Grantham, as if in continuance, interrupted him.

'She is happy enough, poor little thing, this morning.'

'Why?' asked Trafford, curiously.

'Her cousin is coming down to see her to-morrow.'

'Oh, indeed!'

'Here she is. Come, gentlemen;' and Miss Grantham walked to the door. Trafford looked up as Maggie descended the stair. Miss Grantham was right. There was a wonderful bright sweetness in her face, dimpling round her lips, darkening her eyes. Was *all* this for that unlicked cub of a cousin? Impossible! Yet had she not been used to him from childhood? He must seem very different in her eyes.

Trafford fell in naturally with Maggie. Miss Grantham walked on in front, with the cousins in attendance.

'What a lovely Christmas morning! It is a long time since I saw one so bright,' said Maggie, quite unable to hold her tongue, as Trafford did not seem inclined to talk.

'Indeed; Where were you last Christmas?'

'At Nice; and Mrs Berry was very unwell and rather cross.'

'So you were *triste*, I suppose?'

'Yes, I was, very. Then Christmas is nicer in England than anywhere.'

'*I* have enjoyed it very much at Bagdad.'

'Bagdad! What an extraordinary place to spend Christmas! You ought to have brought the wonderful lamp away with you, at least.'

'I wish I had; at any rate I ascertained that there were still forty thieves, and more, to be found there. So you like Christmas best in England?'

'My idea of Christmas is the English one; but indeed the four or five I passed with Uncle and Aunt Grey are not so pleasant to think about.'

'So they have left Beverly Street?'

'Yes; but how do you know?'

Trafford smiled, half vexed with himself for having made the observation, and yet curious to see how she would take the unavoidable reply to her question.

'When Lady Torchester received no answer to her letter I rode

past one morning, intending to ask if you were still on the Continent, and found the house shut up. I feared you had gone away into space, and would be seen no more. I little thought I should be escorting you to church on Christmas Day.'

Maggie made no reply; she was almost terrified at such a marked interest. He had thought of her, he had tried to trace her! What could it mean? A sudden intuition of the close but unacknowledged link between them flashed across her so overpoweringly that instead of colouring she turned pale. Fortunately, Miss Grantham, looking back at that moment, asked what had become of Colonel Molyneux.

'He always selects Sundays and festivals for letter-writing. We left him with a box of cigars and a pile of correspondence.'

Miss Grantham went on, and Maggie was herself again, unconscious of any change of colour.

'You are really very good,' she said, after a little pause; 'you always have been'—trying hard to think him just a friendly superior, and nothing more. 'I was so pleased with the beautiful needle-case. Miss Grantham told me about it. It was so kind of you to think of me.'

'Should auld acquaintance be forgot?' said Trafford, while he thought, 'I wish I could keep you out of my head.' 'Remember, I expect the first fruits in the shape of things to put round one's wrist, or a purse, or something.'

'Oh, you shall have both if you will,' cried Maggie, with all the sweet frank gaiety which had so charmed him from their first meeting, and which of late he had somehow missed.

'You are quite yourself, your old self, this morning, Miss Grey,' he could not keep back the words, 'coming events sometimes cast their light, as well as their shadows, before.'

'What do you mean?' asked Maggie, opening her eyes.

'Why, you are naturally pleased at the idea of seeing your cousin to-morrow.' They had reached a stile close to the church, as he spoke, a very civilised easy stile; but still Trafford was bound to offer some assistance, and stood at the further side with upraised hand. His words struck Maggie with a sense of guilt and ingratitude; she had utterly forgotten the expected visitor, and even her original wish that he would not come. So as she looked down into Trafford's eyes from the top of the stile a sudden change passed over her face, and it said so plainly, 'That is a trouble you need not have reminded me of,' even while her lips said, 'Yes, it is

a long time since we met at Christmas,' that, in spite of reason and self-control, and all the schooling to which he had subjected himself, he could not prevent his fingers from closing over the little hand placed in them, more tightly and lingeringly than he ought. A few minutes after, they were kneeling in church, and while Trafford with well-bred observance was repeating the responses, he repeated over and over to himself, 'Heart free, even though engaged.'

Grantham Church was a very old, grey, much repaired, little edifice, where the besom of architectural and ritualistic reform had not, as yet, swept away high square pews and a box-like pulpit. Indeed, at the date of our story, the ritualistic tide had hardly gathered headway, and the rector, an excellent old country gentleman, charitable, easy, scholarly, could scarce have been roused either to innovation or resistance. He would have been terribly at the mercy of a determined gentleman-like curate in a single-breasted coat with a standing collar. As yet, this thorn had been spared his comfortable flesh. He read admirably, and his curate, a mild young man in spectacles, relieved him of the earlier portions of the service in a manner modelled on his own.

The Grantham pew was a small room, with breast high walls and luxurious though faded appliances for devotion.

Maggie observed the second largest pew, decorated like their own by a coronet and a cipher, was occupied by a party of two ladies, two school-boys, and an elderly gentleman. It had always been empty before.

One of the ladies, very small, very fair, with pale golden hair and large languishing dark eyes, looked frequently at their pew, and once smiled at Miss Grantham. She was exquisite in dress and style; her costume of black velvet and sable, her bonnet enlivened with marabout feathers tipped with blue and toned down with rich point lace, bespoke an *élégante* of the first quality. The service (which was managed with the nicest possible balance between *presto* and *adagio*) over, Miss Grantham stopped in the porch, while the gentlemen in attendance waited in the churchyard, or assisted the Countess, Lady Dormer, and Mr Bolton into the carriage, which had conveyed them by a more circuitous route. Lady Brockhurst (as the exquisite stranger proved to be) met Miss Grantham with much warmth. She stood on tiptoe to bestow a little graceful kiss on her friend; then the two boys were called up and noticed, and the ladies moved slowly to the gate, where

the Brockhurst equipage waited, and stood there a few moments laughing and talking with much animation. Lord Torchester was called and presented, and the *mignonne* viscountess held out her hand to Trafford most graciously, and bowed distantly to Grantham Longmore, who, finding himself somewhat in the position of an outsider with Maggie, who was trying to read the half-effaced inscriptions on the old tombstones while she waited, addressed her for the first time, and so saved himself from seeming quite neglected. He only abused the high pews, and said that there was a strong feeling against them at Oxford. Then Lady Brockhurst got into her carriage, and saying, 'Monday then, at two; and I shall expect you, Mr Trafford,' drove away.

'Come, Miss Grey—come, Grantham! if you are not too absorbed. I am quite cold; let us walk quickly.'

The little party kept more together on their homeward way, and Mr Longmore assisted Maggie over the stile this time. Miss Grantham went into raptures over Lady Brockhurst, her bonnet, her charming manner, her kindness, &c., to all of which Trafford gave quiet, stinging replies, which proved his aversion to that fascinating lady.

'I suppose, then, since you are so stupid as to believe all the ill-natured things people say,' cried Miss Grantham with some asperity, 'you will not come over to luncheon at Southam on Monday?'

'No, I shall not; and I wish you would ride with me instead, for I think of going to town on Tuesday.'

'But you will return?' said Miss Grantham, quickly, colouring as she spoke.

'Not at present. You have been wonderfully amiable to have given me house-room so long.'

'Oh, Geoff, that is all nonsense! You must stay and see the old year out. I will hear no more about it—not a word. Torchester, *you* will come with me to Southam, will you not? Lady Brockhurst says she has one or two amusing people she met in Paris staying there.'

'I am at your orders,' and then the Earl and his cousin walked on. Trafford kept with Maggie and Mr Longmore. The gentlemen, however, did all the talking, and their quiet companion listened and was very happy; though all the time she was fighting hard to keep a certain sentence from repeating itself with a silvery sound as of joybells, over and over again: 'I rode past one morning, intending to ask if you were still on the Continent.' So she

had not been quite forgotten and unheeded. There was a place for her, small though she was and of 'no reputation,' in a memory that must be so full of grand subjects and profound learning; but she could not quite banish those delicious 'peals of merry music from the belfry of her heart,' or rather while she silenced them one moment she listened for them the next.

Altogether, Christmas Day at Grantham was a very bright bit in memory's tesselated pavement.

Luncheon was waiting when they reached the Hall, and Maggie was quite delighted with the beautiful decorations of the dining-room. Lady Torchester had a good deal to say respecting the coldness of the service and the lukewarm nature of the sermon. She wished for the poor dear rector's own sake that he had Mr Blakemore for a curate. Mr Blakemore would, perhaps, open his eyes a little to his own condition.

Then the objectionable Colonel Molyneux, who seemed to enjoy his luncheon as if he had walked to church and back instead of staying at home like a heathen, observed that he thought the rector looked in capital condition, and Miss Grantham said she thought that at his age he was not likely to change, even for the most evangelical curate.

Lady Torchester, while accepting another cutlet, remarked gloomily that she did not allude to his physical condition.

'He is subject to severe sore throats in winter,' said Lady Dormer, 'and perhaps change might do him good.'

Then Miss Grantham asked Lady Torchester if she did not think she might ask Lady Brockhurst and her party over to dinner some day, and Lady Torchester said decidedly not; and there was a good deal of talk about London, in which Maggie did not join, but sat enjoying the warmth and beauty of the room, with its rich crimson draperies and Turkey carpet, the glowing fire throwing bright facets of light and colour on the dark polished furniture and crystal and silver, the hothouse flowers and ferns lending their own peculiar grace and perfume to the table, the glimpse through the windows of endless branchlets and twigs and smooth-leaved evergreens, all sparkling in the crisp frost, the sound of animated voices —it was a pleasant hour.

Dinner was a very brilliant affair indeed in Maggie's eyes. Trafford took her in and she sat between him and Mr Bolton, who talked a great deal to her and was quite civil. Then there was music, and not a little desultory talk, and Christmas Day was

gone. Maggie marked it with a white stone in her own mind. every one had been kind and civil, and she had not felt one bit *de trop* in that grand company.

The next day was equally bright and sparkling, still it had not the same glory to Maggie. She drove soberly to church with Lady Dormer, and returned in good time to await Cousin John's arrival, as he was to come down by an early train. Miss Grantham had directed that a conveyance should be sent to Castleford, so Maggie retired to her own quarters with a book, but not to read.

No; she sat and thought steadily over all John's acts of kindness to her in old times. How, when, a broken-hearted little waif, her uncle had brought her away from the sweet tender home of her childhood and the loveliness of her lost mother's love, she had groped about in the thick darkness which had closed around her—darkness that might be felt!—for something, anything, to cling to and love—Cousin John put himself in her trembling hands. And though he was rough, his roughness never hurt; nay, his fierce unfaltering opposition to his stepmother cheered her by its droll aspects, and roused her innate courage by a sort of contagion. Did he not often bring her stray bits of toffy, and even an occasional bull's eye? With what confidence, when extra-miserable, had she not sometimes rushed into his arms and sobbed on his shoulder. And when once, not long before he left her, the loneliest little wretch in existence, he had had a bad cold, was she not proud to carry up his cup, when he was permitted the luxury of taking his tea in bed? With what pleasure she had received his letter in Paris, and looked forward to meeting him! But between that time and the present a great chasm had yawned, and throw in what precious things she might of gratitude or memory it would *not* close. Then, though she always remembered John an uncouth and unattractive creature, he had a certain humility, even in his strength and courage, which was touching; now, he was destroyed by the materialism of success; he thought himself destined to go forth conquering and to conquer. Apart from this, how glad she would be to see him!

Her little maid had laid the table, and put fresh coal on the fire, which burned up vividly, and Maggie looked round with great satisfaction, when re-enter Jane.

'A gentleman for you, Miss.' A rush of cold air, and she was nearly lifted off her feet in a hearty hug.

'Why you are looking pounds better, Mag!' cried Cousin John. holding her off at arm's length.

'I am so glad to see you, John,' disengaging herself quickly. How kind of you to come all this way.'

'Kind!' cried John, unwinding a crimson and yellow scarf from his throat. 'Why, I have been dying to come for this month past; and I dare say you know that well enough. What an elegant room! By George; you have fallen on your feet, Maggie. But I thought we were to dine by ourselves?' looking round distrustfully.

'So we are; this is my room—my special room.'

'You don't mean it! It is first-rate. Why, you will not like to leave all this?'

'No, of course not.'

'Still it isn't your own, you know. This is uncommon jolly! I had rather a rum Christmas Day. Didn't go down to the governor's because I was coming here; so Banks (you know Fred Banks) sked me to dine at their place. He has a couple of sisters, ana one of them is an uncommon fine girl. Hair black as coal, eyes like sloes.'

'I trust in heaven,' thought Maggie, 'he has fallen in love with her!' 'How very nice!' said she aloud. 'But John, dear, dinner will be ready immediately; would you not like to go to your room?'

John glanced at his hands, which presented an unavoidable affirmative, and Maggie rang and confided him to the guidance of little Jane, while she sank into a chair, overpowered by the consciousness that all her communings with herself were in vain, and that Cousin John's outer crust—however admirable, however deserving of affection the qualities which lay beneath—was hopelessly objectionable.

When dinner was over—with which Cousin John expressed himself highly pleased—he calmly produced his pipe, which he was proceeding to light, when Maggie impounded it.

'I am sorry, John, but—I think you had better not smoke. None of the gentlemen smoke here, except in the smoking-room, ever so far away. I do not think Miss Grantham could bear to smell tobacco.'

'Well, it's rather hard a fellow can't have his pipe.'

'Come, you may do without it for once—when you are paying me a visit; and then you can smoke in your own room.'

'All right then; and an uncommon nice room it is, with a jolly fire, and towels enough for a regiment. What a lot of coals they must burn here!'

'I suppose so. I will show you the house to-morrow, and, if it is fine, we will have a walk in the park.'

'Capital! And, Mag, I must leave you to-morrow some time, as late as I can make it. I have an appointment in the City, at twelve, on Tuesday.' Then John proceeded to unfold his news, and it was all good. He was succeeding so well, that when he returned to the Cape, as he intended in May, he thought he would take a wife with him; but he was uncommon particular; every one would not suit him. There was Fred Banks' sister, a fine handsome girl, ready to jump at him, he was pretty sure; but somehow, he did not feel as if 'she would do, exactly.'

'Why, no,' replied Maggie; 'not if you think she is ready to jump at you; that must destroy the charm.'

'What charm?' asked John. 'I think one is inclined to be all the fonder of a girl when she shows she likes you, and knows her own mind.'

'Well, perhaps so,' said Maggie, not caring to talk of things Cousin John could not understand.

'I can tell you, Miss Maggie, nothing disgusts a man who is in earnest, and hasn't much time to spare, as playing fast and loose, shillyshallying.'

'Very likely; but I am sure you have plenty of time to spare, John. It would be time enough if you were to marry in four or five years.'

'You may think so, but I don't.'

'And—I *must* tell you what I think, John—if you were not quite so sure about yourself, and thought more of whether you are worthy of a good, high-minded girl, it would be better, and you would be more likely to find one.'

John looked both vexed and surprised. 'You're a queer little creature, Mag. Why are you always preaching to me? Why ain't I worthy of a good girl? What have I done wrong? I have been a steady chap always, and I have made my own way. I've pluck enough and energy enough to be a stand-by to any woman; and —you don't know how fond I'd be of a wife! So what more could any girl want? I begin to think you are a trifle ill-natured, Mag.'

'No, indeed, I am not,' cried Maggie, seeing the hopelessness of

the material on which she tried to work, and resolved to make his visit as pleasant as possible, especially as she began to hope he was thinking of some one else than herself for a wife. 'Indeed I am not. Only I feel anxious about you; it would make me so unhappy if I thought you had not a nice, kind, reasonable wife—a real helpmate; but you really must not think all the merit on your own side.'

'Perhaps,' said John, with a twinkle in his eye, 'you would rather I did not marry Polly Banks, after all?'

'I cannot possibly tell. She may suit you exactly, and be most charming; but I should like you to marry a nice, true-hearted, loving girl, who would both make you happy and do you good.'

'You would?' cried Cousin John; 'now that's spoken like a trump, and I can tell you I have just such a wife in my eye,' and John winked hard, 'as you shall know, all in good time. Now I'd like to give you a kiss; but you are such a queer touchy little thing, I am afraid of vexing you.'

'Shake hands, then, it will do much better,' she said, shrinking more intensely than ever from such familiarity; a horrible dread flashing across her that she herself was the wife he had in his eye.

'You may think so, but I do not,' grumbled John.

'Now tell me all about my uncle and every one; I have written twice to them, and never had a reply.'

'They are getting along like a house on fire. It was altogether a lucky hit, shoving off the governor to that quiet country place; he has quite roused up, and the missus is as mild as new milk. Lord, Maggie, how she used to hate you and me long ago! Many's the time you have run crying into my arms; and now you won't give a fellow a kiss to save his life.'

'Oh! you know it is quite different now; so don't bother, like a dear. But don't think I forget or am ungrateful.'

'I think you are a blessed little brick!'

'And is Ditton Market a pretty place?' asked Maggie, to turn the current of his thoughts.

'Pretty fair, there's a deal of business in it; and do you know, Mag, I think I have found a partner for the governor?'

'Indeed! Who?'

'Fred Banks. He has got four or five hundred pounds from an uncle, who is just dead, and he is a pushing fellow; he would do very well out of London, and I think he has a fancy for Jemima,

so may be that will keep him steady. You see I will get back part of my outlay sooner than I thought.' And so on, Cousin John continued to pour forth his plans and projects; then, noticing the piano, he asked for some music; so Maggie proceeded to play all the hymns she could remember. Shortly before retiring, John asked what work she had to do. On her giving a sketch of her occupations he uttered an oath of astonishment. 'What! and you have sixty pounds a year for running after this great lady! Many a man gives hard toil for less. However, I am glad you have it, and that you are so comfortable. I had not a notion of the luxury these nobs live in. Anyhow, it is as well for you to be here just now. But I say, Mag, as I drove up this afternoon I saw two gents walking in the avenue, a stout elderly man and a tall thin swell, uncommon like the chap that stopped us one day in the Park.'

'Yes, I dare say it was Mr Trafford,' said Maggie, beginning to sweep up the few cinders which had collected since tea; 'he is staying here. He is one of Miss Grantham's numerous relations.'

'Oh,' said John, and was silent for a moment. 'That's queer,' he resumed. 'I suppose you did not expect to meet him here? suspiciously.

'Never dreamed of such a thing; never was so surprised in my life as when he arrived.'

'Well, Maggie, don't you let him make love to you. These swells are a bad lot, and whatever they may pretend, not one of them would think of marrying you. I dare say'——

'Pray don't give yourself the trouble of warning me,' said Maggie haughtily. 'I am perfectly aware of my position; but do not for a moment suppose that any gentleman in this house would so insult me.'

'Bless your heart! they would not think it an insult,' cried John.

'As to Mr Trafford, I think he will marry Miss Grantham,' added Maggie.

'Ha! well, that's all right.'

Meanwhile dinner had passed off in the usual fashion. Lady Torchester had explained to Colonel Molyneux the general prospects of the Society for Converting the Jews, and the Colonel seemed deeply interested. Lord Brockhurst's state of health had been discussed, and also a report mentioned by the rector to Mr

Bolton, that Mr Burge intended to resign parliamentary life for the present.

'Now, Geoff,' cried the blatant Earl, 'there is a chance for you. The Grantham interest is yours, we know; so I should advise you to go in and win.'

'Yes, the good people of Castleford know so much about me.'

'As much as the good people of any other place,' said Bolton.

'And they know *your* people at any rate,' added Miss Grantham.

'I am going to start as candidate for the chieftainship of the missing tribes of Israel, supposed to be located in Abyssinia. Perhaps Lady Torchester's friends of the Jewish Society will give me their vote and interest,' replied Trafford with more of scorn than he often showed; and Bolton, who was about to speak, stopped himself at a look from Miss Grantham.

When the gentlemen came into the drawing-room Miss Grantham was sitting a little apart from the other ladies, and Trafford joined her. 'You cannot think how I miss Miss Grey,' she said, laying down a quarterly she was seeming to read. 'I have grown so used to her; she is so companionable and sympathetic.'

'I suppose we shall have no music to-night then, sacred or secular?'

'Oh, I can play, you know, Geoff; only I prefer having my accompaniments played for me. But I shall let Miss Grey enjoy her cousin's visit. I heard her singing hymns as I passed her room. I dare say they are very happy. I am sure I hope so, for a bit of real happiness seems a rare jewel. Come now, Geoff, you are not going to run away with these horrid African explorers, nor are you going to cut us on Tuesday?' And she looked up very sweetly out of her great blue eyes.

'No, on Wednesday,' replied Trafford carelessly. He was seeing a picture which Miss Grantham's words had conjured up. Maggie seated at the piano, breathing out some sweet old hymn which she and her cousin had sung together in childhood; and he, with his rough red hair, ill-cut clothes, untutored voice, and great big hands, was leaning over her, enjoying without let or hindrance her confidence, her society—probably was saying good night at that moment with a cousinly kiss or two! It was maddening to think of it, and Trafford longed to tear him away, and send him, bitter cold though it was, back to Castleford and London that very night. His face darkened as he thought, and when he came to himself Miss Grantham was saying, 'After all, you are very ill-natured to desert me,

for you are my greatest friend of them all, and my best friend, I believe.'

'I could never *desert* you, but I may as well go away next Wednesday as the Wednesday after. I cannot stay in your enchanted halls for ever.'

Miss Grantham made no answer, neither did she raise her eyes from the ground, and Trafford went on without noticing her.

'Besides, I have particular business in London, so I must go up with Bolton, and will be most happy to execute any commands of yours. I fear the manuscript will not be finished in time, or you might confide it to my care.'

Miss Grantham looked sad. 'And when will you come back?' she said.

'Whenever you ask me.'

'But Heaven knows where you will be the week after next.'

'My address will be "The Albany" for a fortnight.'

'And after?'

'Oh, that is diving too far into futurity. At any rate, I shall certainly be in London to see you presented.' A pause.

'I do not know how it is, Geoff, but I think you are cross, or out of sorts or something, to-night.'

'If I am *something* to you I am fortunate,' returned Trafford, but so carelessly that the bearing of the words was neutralised. 'Seriously, you know, I would come a long way to do anything for my favourite kinswoman; so pray dispel the clouds you fancy you observe, by a song.'

And Trafford looked down kindly on the beautiful girl who showed him so much favour. There was too much sympathy in his nature, too much admiration for beauty and grace, to permit of steady indifference, and Margaret Grantham might well be excused for believing that his object in leaving was to avoid an attachment in which he was too severely honourable to entangle her till she had seen more of the world.

So she went very contentedly to the piano, and it was some little time before she missed Trafford, who had vanished, and did not reappear.

The next morning Maggie presented herself in the study. Miss Grantham was at her writing-desk. 'No, I will give you a complete holiday,' she said in reply to Maggie's offer to relieve her of some letters. 'Most of these will keep very well till to-morrow, so you can do the honours of Grantham to your cousin. I want

to see him; tell him to come here, for I shall soon dress to ride over to Southam.'

'You will think him very unpolished, I am afraid,' said Maggie as she left the room. Cousin John was reclining in one chair, with his feet on another, reading a Sunday paper.

'Miss Grantham wants to see you.'

'Well, I don't mind,' said John, rising and putting down his paper.

'But your slippers!—dear John, you must put on your boots.'

'Oh! yes, I suppose so,' glancing at the carpet abominations that covered his feet.

'*Do* make haste, and I will work you a prettier pair,' cried Maggie as he vanished.

'I have brought my cousin, Miss Grantham—my great friend,' said Maggie, ushering him into the sacred study.

Miss Grantham rose from her writing-table and made a slight bend, or bow, or gesture of reception, sufficiently decided to check John Grey's tendency to put out his hand. She smiled graciously however, and said, with her sweet polished manner, 'Very pleased to see him; sit down, Mr Grey.' But Maggie was aware of a slight expression of surprise as her eye fell upon this new importation. Yet Cousin John was unusally well dressed, with nothing very objectionable in his toilette, except a long black necktie with very red ends passed through a ring. His hair and beard were wild as ever, and his hands flagrantly large, rough, and obtrusive; while his boots—Maggie wondered she had never before noticed how appallingly huge and clumsy they were, and how agonisingly they creaked. Nevertheless she could not help admiring the owner's perfect ease and self-possession. He stared rather hard at his beautiful hostess as she sat opposite to him in the warm perfumed atmosphere of her luxurious study, her exquisitely arranged hair, her rich flowing dress, the locket of black enamel and diamonds at her throat, the unspeakable ease and grace of her gestures and attitude—bespeaking a lifetime of culture and observance. The extraordinary contrast between them flashed through Maggie's brain, while John, with much coolness, took the initiative and remarked:

'You have an uncommon fine place here.'

Yes; it is pretty in summer. And I hope you find your cousin looking well and happy, Mr Grey,' continued Miss Grantham, bent on fascinating even this Orson.

'That she is,' said John heartily, turning a look of such undisguised delight upon his young relative that Miss Grantham could not suppress a smile. 'She looks ever so much better than when she left us. I did not like the idea of her coming here or anywhere as a sort of a servant, but now I have seen the place and you'—with a patronising nod—'I am glad she did.'

'Miss Grey is my companion,' said Miss Grantham, gravely.

'Ay! but you see we did not know she would be; these betwixt and between situations are not always pleasant. However, she's happy, and I am sure I think she is in great luck.'

A pause, during which John's eyes roved openly over the objects about him and 'took stock' mentally, as he himself would have phrased it, of the rich furniture and surroundings.

'And you have been away for some time, Miss Grey tells me,' recommenced Miss Grantham, rather amused by Orson's *sang froid*.

'Five years,' returned John abruptly; 'went off to seek my fortune, as the story books say.'

'I trust you have succeeded,' said Miss Grantham politely.

'Oh, not yet. A fortune is not to be made in a jiffey, but I think I have hit on the right road to it. It must be a wonderful thing to step into a fortune ready made; but I fancy a man is twice as proud of one he made himself.'

'So do I, Mr Grey,' exclaimed the heiress sympathetically. 'Were I a man I should like to carve my way to fortune myself.'

'So you would,' replied John, with decided admiration. 'Were you a man there is not much you'd stop at.'

Maggie looked at her patroness, positively alarmed at this audacious outburst when she thought of the profound and tender deference with which the princess of Grantham was treated by her kinsfolk and acquaintance; but the heiress's vanity was flattered by this hearty acknowledgment of the impression she had made, and she laughed good-humouredly. 'You flatter me, Mr Grey.'

'I'd be very sorry,' said John, sturdily.

'Do you intend to return to'—she paused, not knowing what destination to give him.

'The Cape?' put in John. 'Yes, life is pleasanter and easier there, and money is to be made.'

'Miss Grey will be very sorry. You have been friends from childhood?'

'Yes, I always tried to take care of her, and will, so long as she behaves herself,' with a laugh. 'But I am not going out till

May, and there is no knowing what may happen before May, eh, Mag?' and he laid a huge heavy hand on her shoulder. Maggie started, blushed crimson, and instinctively drew away, while Miss Grantham slightly frowned. In spite of the discrimination shown by this uncouth creature she did not like to see him touch her pet secretary.

'I am told there is an expedition forming to seek for the sources of the Nile,' said she, to change the subject.

'I believe there is, and it is great bosh. What good will it do to know where it comes from so long as we keep the river?'

'It will be interesting to clear up an ancient mystery, and the search may prove useful in many ways.'

'It is like throwing good money after bad. I know what these explorations cost in money and labour and risk; and if you are to get no return'——

'I fear you are hopelessly practical, Mr Grey.'

'I think you are going out, Miss Grantham,' put in Maggie, fearing that if John got on the subject of Africa he would be very likely to expound his views at great length, 'and we must not keep you.'

John rose. 'If you would like a gazelle or two to run about the place, or some out-of-the-way birds, I would be glad to send you over a few.'

'It would be quite charming, if not too much trouble.'

'I don't think you are the sort that people mind trouble for, returned John with another appallingly familiar nod.

'When do you leave, Mr Grey?'

'By the seven o'clock up-train.'

'Then you must be away from this at half-past six. Good morning. Very pleased to have seen you. Rest satisfied your cousin shall be taken good care of,' and they were politely dismissed.

'By jingo!' cried John when they had reached Maggie's room, throwing himself into a chair, 'that Miss Grantham *is* a stunner, and no mistake! Such eyes, such a figure, and so nice and pleasant! I tell you, Mag, if I were going to stay on here we'd be no end of friends.' Then noticing Maggie's expression of surprise at his extraordinary conceit, which he totally misunderstood; 'Never mind, Mag, she'll never cut you out. You'll always be number one with me. Now let us have a walk.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHILE Maggie did the honours of Grantham to Cousin John, privately returning thanks for that important appointment which obliged him to take the seven up-train that very evening, Trafford, having written a few letters, was going towards the hall, intending to spend an hour or two in the preserves, as the frost was too hard to permit of hunting.

'Where are you bound?' said Mr Bolton, coming out of the library.

'Going to see if I can hit a pheasant or two before luncheon.'

'Let the birds have another day's existence, and have a talk with me. I never get a word with you now.'

'Very well,' returned Trafford resignedly, laying aside his hat.

'Deuced cold,' said the lawyer, stirring the fire. 'I don't know how it is, I feel queer and uncomfortable the last day or so. Now, Mr Trafford, do you really intend to come away with me on Wednesday?'

'I do. Why? Do you object?'

'That depends on whether you really have business, and when you mean to return.'

'I have business enough to swear by, and I do not intend to return—"It may be for years, it may be for ever."'

'Hum! and do you continue to throw away all your chances? Here is a seat in parliament, a splendid property, and a splendid girl, all to be had for the having; and you'll not stretch out your hand. You are enough to vex a saint, and I am not one.'

'Then do not be vexed; and above all, don't be profane; for it is horribly profane to insinuate that any splendid girl is to be had for the having.'

'Still, you know I am speaking truth; but let us leave that part. You told me some time ago, you were not averse to a parliamentary life; here is a first-rate opening. You are Liberal in your proclivities; the Granthams were always Whigs. You can consistently accept the family interest. I have already sounded old Burge's son; he is a plain, straightforward, unambitious fellow. I think he would give all his influence to Miss Grantham's candidate.'

'There,' said Trafford, 'you have just hit it. I do not choose to make my début as Miss Grantham's candidate.'

'Situated as you are, you must be some one's candidate. Why not hers?'

'Well, I do not care to be any one's; yet, my dear Bolton,' he spoke with more gravity, 'I know perfectly well that I have done nothing to recommend me to any constituency; and if I came in at all, I must do so under somebody's wing. That is the reason why I don't care to make a move.'

'And in the mean while time is flying by. Why, it is coming nearly to a year since we first talked your affairs over when you came from Canada,' interrupted Bolton testily. 'Then you spent the best part of the season running after the Earl, and here you are at the same game still.'

'I suppose my idleness and seeming want of decision must be most aggravating to a man of action like you. I am sometimes irritated with myself; yet it is hard to say why I cannot throw myself into anything; but I cannot. I have often in my various journeys come to a broken bit of road, an ugly piece of marsh, or a narrow touch-and-go pass along a mountain-side, when I did not know what was to come, or how to get through; then I generally gave the rein to my horse, and somehow, the instinct I did not possess, carried me safely into ground I understood; and now I feel something like the same abandonment of all attempt to force my own will or guide my fate. I have thrown the reins on the neck of that jade Fortune; and somehow I fancy she will carry me into *terra cognita;* trust me, once I know my bearings, I will spare neither whip nor spur.'

'It is aggravating to hear a man of your sense talk'——

'Like an idiot, eh, Bolton? My good old friend, you had better give me my head. You know what Madame de Staël says: "Il ne faut jamais faire agir un homme dans un sens différent de son caractère;" if you do, he makes a mull of everything. And there is no urgent necessity for me to be frantically energetic.'

'No! but I don't like to see you lost in obscurity all your days. However, I will say no more on that head. You know yourself what you want, I presume. You must, nevertheless, hear my experiences on the subject of celibacy. I never had much of a sentimental period, but I do not mean to say I was without human weaknesses. At all events, I considered matrimony a mistake for a young man; so I went on, and grew old, and now I would give a

good deal to have a family round me; a nice daughter to nurse me when I have the gout; a son to renew my links with life. A solitary old man is not an enviable creature.

'But,' replied Trafford mischievously, 'according to your general view of life, your daughters would, by this time, be engaged with their own husbands and families, and your sons would probably waste your money and worry you to death.'

'And there would be an equal chance the other way,' returned Bolton, good-humouredly. 'Come, now, Mr Trafford, you are just the right age to marry and settle prudently. I suppose you have got through the idiotic period, when only one particular woman could satisfy you, and are aware that she who is sufficiently pleasant to the eye, and suited to your worldly requirements, is the right article? Now if a professed dealer in magic had been engaged to produce it, could a better specimen have been found than is here at your hand?'

'Do not be too sure I have survived the idiotic period, Bolton. Come, I have not seen my thirty-third birthday yet; besides, I am a sportsman by temperament and habit, and you know there is ten times more interest and pleasure in stalking the wild hill-side game than in the best preserves.'

'I trust in God, Mr Trafford,' said Bolton gravely, 'that you are not entangled in any way! I know I speak to you rather freely, but the fact is, the only people I ever cared for much were your father and mother; they always allowed me the footing of a friend rather than a mere legal adviser. And I have a sort of fatherly interest in you; so, without presuming to pry into your secrets, I may express a hope that you are not entangled?'

'My dear Bolton, I am always obliged for your friendly interest; and as to entanglements, I am free as air.' Trafford rose as he spoke, and strolled to the window.

'I am very pleased to hear you say so; very.'

Trafford threw open the window without noticing that Bolton was speaking, as the tramp of horses was heard. 'So you are off?' he called to some one outside. 'Are your horses roughed? It is rather unsafe riding to-day.'

'I think we are all right,' replied Miss Grantham; 'and the Southam road is sheltered from the east, so it will not be quite so hard. You ought to have come, Geoff.'

'Mr Bolton has impounded me'

'I am glad of that.'

'I fancy we'll have a change of wind before night,' said Lord Torchester.

'Mind you bring back your precious charge safe and sound,' called out Trafford to the Earl, as they rode away. 'She is a grand creature, and deserves more than half a heart,' he added, looking after them, as he closed the window.

'Then, my dear Mr Trafford, if you are free as air, why don't you give her a whole one?

'"Is human love the growth of human will?"'

quoted Trafford laughing. 'Give me time and rope enough. Now I will tell you what I mean to do, so far as I have any meaning. When I am alone in my chambers I will toss up whether I shall make an exploring expedition into Africa, or overland to China, or settle down to a legal career. It is the only one for which I feel a tendency; the struggle of wit and skill must be rather exhilarating; and I begin to find life, without occupation or excitement, a dull affair. Dine with me on New Year's Day, and I will tell you more.'

'I will do so with pleasure. And about Castleford?'

'No more at present. I don't fancy being "pale fair Margaret's" nominee. Where is the Colonel?'

'Out with Longmore and some of the keepers. I think they talked of shooting a deer in the Upper Chase.'

'Then I will follow them.'

The day went over quicker than Maggie anticipated. John was highly entertained by a circuit of the house and grounds; his observations on the family pictures were original and irreverent; and his appreciation of the good fare provided for his afternoon meal, keen and grateful.

At last half-past six arrived, and Jane announced that the carriage was waiting for Mr Grey.

'Good-bye, Mag! I have had a jolly time. Mind you write to me; and whatever you do, don't let these swells make love to you; they'd humbug to no end, and laugh at you after.'

'I can take care of myself, so make your mind easy. My kindest love to dear Uncle Grey, when you see him, and every one.'

'God bless you, Mag!'—half a dozen hasty kisses, and he was gone. 'What a wicked heartless girl I am,' thought Maggie, 'to be so very glad he is gone. He, who is perhaps the only one in the

world who really cares for me! But I cannot help it. It would kill me to live with John, even if I had never seen'——even in her thoughts she stopped short, and began diligently to put her little sitting-room in order, for John had a way of dragging chairs out of their places, and throwing anti-macassars about. 'I wonder if Miss Grantham will expect me down-stairs to-night? I will not go unless she asks me; but I hope I am not to be left up here all alone. What a desolate life I should have if Miss Grantham was not so charming!'

'Miss Grantham wishes to see you,' said Mrs Hands, putting in her head.

Maggie found her dressing in haste, for she was late.

'I have had the most delightful visit! Such amusing people—but I will tell you all about it after. I thought we should have been even later. However, there is a slight thaw, so we came back at a great pace. Is your cousin gone? Then pray come down this evening. I quite missed you yesterday. I wish you would look in the study for that duet from "Anna Bolena" and bring it down with you.'

Maggie went into the study to make the desired search. It looked most inviting in the fire-light for a reverie; and Maggie sat down by the table, and leaning her elbows on it, rested her head on her hands and thought rather sadly and bitterly of John's parting warning; of its truth; of the isolation to which a taste above her station condemned her; and while she was thus absorbed, she was unaware that a gentleman came half-way through the open door, and stopped on seeing her sitting motionless, in an attitude so expressive of dejection. Trafford had suddenly remembered the manuscript and taken it up, intending to replace it in the study on his way down-stairs to dinner. The door stood open, and he went in. Seeing, however, that his entrance was unperceived, he retreated, not without a feeling of impatience and vexation to think that Maggie should be thus grieving over the loss of that 'ourang' of a cousin.

'We grew quite uneasy about you,' said Lady Torchester to Miss Grantham, after the soup and fish had disappeared. 'You were so late.'

'Oh! we could not get away. Lady Brockhurst was so delightful, and altogether it was so amusing. There is an Algerian chief staying there and a German Baron somebody, a professor of some-

thing, and a charming Frenchwoman whom Torchester knew in Paris, who inquired particularly for you, Geoff—Madame de Beaumanoir.'

'Oh! she is an old friend of Geoff's,' said the Earl. 'He introduced me to the Hotel de Pontigny; and a most magnificent hotel it is.'

'Madame de Beaumanoir!' cried Trafford, in the deepest amazement. 'How, in the name of heaven, did she come to Southam?'

'She is an old friend of Lady Brockhurst's, they were together in Paris when Lord Brockhurst left; and so she accompanied the disconsolate wife back, to keep her company and see something of English life *en province*. She knows London very well, evidently, and seemed quite at home at Southam.'

'The last thing that I could imagine that would suit her is country life anywhere,' remarked Trafford, who seemed still much surprised.

'I do not think I ever heard you mention her, Torchester,' said his mother.

'Very likely not. She was Trafford's friend, and only threw me a word now and then for his sake.'

'She seemed quite amiable to-day,' put in Miss Grantham. Trafford seemed lost in thought.

'She was wonderfully amiable. I say, Geoff, you must go over and call. I told her you were going back to town the day after to-morrow, and she said she hoped to see you,' added the Earl.

'Yes, of course, I must,' replied Trafford, looking anything but pleased. 'I see,' he continued, 'you were a true prophet. There is quite a thaw this evening. I dare say we will have a tolerable run to-morrow.'

'It is not to-morrow,' said the Colonel. 'The meet was postponed till Wednesday; and I dare say it will freeze again by that time.'

'Oh! there is no use in speaking of Wednesday,' cried Miss Grantham. 'Geoff is so resolved to go up to town with Mr Bolton, that no hunting or anything else will keep him.'

'I am not so sure of that,' said Bolton. 'Like Lord Torchester, I saw signs of a change this morning.

'I have exhausted my entreaties,' said Miss Grantham, a little haughtily. 'He must go or stay, as he chooses.'

Trafford looked at her, smiling slightly. 'Going or staying is not always a matter of choice,' he said, and let the subject drop.

When the ladies came in from dinner, Maggie fancied there was

a change in the aspect of things since the previous Saturday. Miss Grantham looked preoccupied, and there was a cloud on Lady Torchester's brow. The visit to which she had looked forward with so much anticipation had rather disappointed the Countess. Though an undemonstrative woman, she had strong affections, and had always taken a warm interest in her motherless relative. She had not seen so much of her for the two years immediately preceding Lord Grantham's death, but she had always destined her, in her own mind, to be her son's wife. Now, though Torchester did not seem disinclined to fall into her unexpressed views, there was a flightiness and want of sober religiousness about the young heiress that startled the orthodox Countess.

Lady Torchester, though not quite so dead to worldly matters as would have become her high calling, valued several things above money or position. She would have given a well-born penniless Evangelical competitor for her son's hand the preference over a well-born wealthy High-Church or No-Church *prêtendante*. The event of a low-born, Low-Church, spiritually-gifted aspirant presenting herself did not enter into the Countess's calculations; it would have been a knotty point for her to disentangle if it did.

As to the very pleasing young person, whom it was Miss Grantham's pleasure to distinguish with so much notice, Lady Torchester had no objection to her; but she never could think without a certain feeling of soreness that her beloved son had placed himself metaphorically at her feet, and had been rejected. However gratifying the result, the means were humiliating. Thus, though studiously polite to the heiress's secretary, the heart-instinct of that attractive little waif made her always feel uncomfortable with the Countess.

'She does not like me a bit in her heart,' was the sum of Maggie's cogitations on this subject. Nevertheless, on this especial evening Lady Torchester called Miss Grey to her, and conversed very amiably. She asked what part of the world her cousin had come from; and if he knew anything personally of the results of missionary labour among the tribes of Kaffirland; and when Maggie admitted that he had never mentioned the subject, remarked that the deadness of young men to the progress of religion was truly deplorable.

While this conversation, or rather monologue, proceeded, the gentlemen joined them; but none of them sought to interrupt the *tête-à-tête* on the sofa. Maggie, in spite of her melancholy musings

on Cousin John's warnings, felt her spirits rise and shake off all superincumbent burdens, as she once more knew herself to be free from the incubus of his presence—once more in the delicious atmosphere of the well-lit, pleasantly-filled drawing-room—where all were too well bred, too well aware of the value of trifles, to grate upon each other, and where the deep unacknowledged delight of hearing Trafford speak, or being spoken to by him, awaited her.

For the present, however, there seemed no chance of that—for Colonel Molyneux and Mr Bolton sat down to piquet, and Trafford seemed to watch the game with much interest. Meantime the Earl and Mr Longmore devoted themselves to Miss Grantham.

Maggie's attention had wandered, and when she recalled it again Lady Torchester was saying, 'I cannot remain longer than this day week, and I feel quite sure when I am gone, Margaret—Miss Grantham—will almost live with Lady Brockhurst; and I make it a point to let you know, Miss Grey, that I by no means approve the intimacy. Besides being worldly in no common degree, Lady Brockhurst's surroundings are most objectionable, and her set the last with which I should like to see Miss Grantham associated. Of course *you* cannot do anything against this; but I think it right to tell you. Indeed, I do not know any one who has much influence with Miss Grantham, unless it be Mr Trafford, and he leaves on Wednesday.'

'He leaves on Wednesday!' Oh, silly heart, to beat so suddenly and so fast. What is his going or his advent to thee? Bear up bravely, and take thy pang of punishment, deserved as it is by such weakness and folly. Plunge headlong into the bitter waters; the shock will be over all the sooner!

Said the Earl to Lady Torchester, coming over from the ottoman where he had been lounging beside his fair hostess, 'Lady Brockhurst is coming to call upon you. She says she was at Mount Trafford with her mother when I was a tiresome boy in jackets, and that it was a charming place.'

'I am not at all anxious to see her,' returned the Countess. 'I do not remember her, but I do remember her brother, Captain Neville—and after his first visit I never invited him again.'

'What? "Beauty Neville?" Why, he is at Southam now, and began to make eyes at Margaret before she had been half an hour in the room.'

Lady Torchester uttered an exclamation of horror, and Maggie

wishing to leave the Earl and his mother to converse uninterruptedly, slipped away to Lady Dormer.

'You have not your game of whist this evening.'

'No, my dear. Miss Grantham offered to play; but I knew it would bore them all, as Mr Bolton is playing piquet—and I am very tired. I drove over to Castleford with Lady Torchester to-day. We got out and walked from one shop to another, and I could not match that second shade of dark blue; it was very provoking,' &c.

Trafford withdrew himself from the players, and occupied the Earl's place on the ottoman. He described the death of the stag which had fallen to the Colonel's bullet that afternoon, and gradually absorbed Miss Grantham's attention so that Mr Longmore found himself *de trop*, and moved off.

'You are an excellent disciplinarian, Margaret,' said Trafford, after a pause.

'How?'

'When naughty boys quarrel with their bread-and-butter you hold them to their word.'

'Ah!' said Miss Grantham smiling, 'it is quite right to give them humble pie instead of nice bread-and-butter, when they are obstinate.'

'But after swallowing a proper quantity of the delectable viand you mention, they might be allowed to come back to the bread-and-butter again?'

'Provided they promise amendment. Then Mr Bolton was right—you do not want to leave on Wednesday? Why, Geoff, I never knew you whimsical before.'

'I fancy you must know I did not really *wish* to leave—at least for a few days longer—and to-day I find I can postpone my return.'

'Oh, stay if you like; but remember, you have forfeited your right to call me whimsical.'

'As you choose. And now we are friends? I fancied you have looked coldly on me since I refused to accompany you to Southam.'

'Nonsense, Geoff. You were the loser in that affair.'

'No music to-night?' asked Mr Longmore. 'There has been quite a dearth of sweet sounds.'

'Yes; and there is Miss Grey cruelly interfering with Aunt Dormer's after-dinner nap. Come, Miss Grey;' and the heiress telegraphed to her secretary.

'Your friend has returned to town?' said Trafford to Maggie,

just before they separated for the night. 'It was but a short visit.

'It was very good of Miss Grantham to let him come even for a day.'

'Do you still see the resemblance between your cousin and Torchester which struck you in Paris?'

'Oh, no—John is so changed; but I did see a likeness then.'

'And which is best, the new man or the old?'

'Old friends for me, always.'

'Ah, Miss Grey! I thought the Princess of Grantham had eclipsed every one?'

'No; she shines with superior splendour, but does not eclipse my old stars.'

Trafford was silent, as if in thought, and then suddenly asked 'what became of—I forget her name—the stout Frenchwoman you used to be afraid would desert you when Mrs Berry was away?'

'Oh, Rosalie?' replied Maggie, blushing brightly at the memories that name recalled. 'We left her in Paris. She and Mrs Berry quarrelled the day we left, and I know no more of her.'

'So all the *dramatis personæ* of those pleasant months have vanished, and you and I alone seem left.'

'Except Lord Torchester.'

'I did not count him. I wonder where we shall all be next year.'

'I always try not to think of that,' said Maggie.

'Are you afraid?'

'Not exactly; but when one knows the future must be all uncertain, there is no use in perpetual dread of dragging one's anchor—it will not hold a moment longer for that.'

'Always philosophic, and a little defiant. You disdain sympathy?'

'Oh no, no! Only I do not like pity; and *equality*, you know, is the essence of affection, sympathy, friendship—everything that is good.'

'Red Republican to the core! Good night, Miss Grey.'

When Trafford found himself in his room, having refused the Earl's invitation to come and have a talk, he uttered an exclamation against the size of the fire. 'I am afraid I have taken more wine than was good for me,' he said to himself, and dismissing his valet, he opened the window and looked out into the night.

It was clear and profoundly still—the mass of leafless woods all

black, and a dark bank of cloud coming slowly up from the west; but directly in front was an open space of deep blue sky, grandly jewelled with stars.

Trafford leant for a few minutes against the window-frame, feeling refreshed by the keen air, and thinking dreamily in a strain for which his kinsfolk and acquaintances would hardly have given him credit. The strong affinity between mute nature and our inner selves, of which we catch glimpses at those rare times when we stand aside for an instant out of the rush of life, and listen to the universal voice that, 'without speech or language,' makes itself heard, and tells that in some mysterious way we partake of all that surrounds us; that the stream of our existence is fed by the thousand rills and springs which pervade all things, animate and inanimate, by unacknowledged influences which shape our being and are our life; the consciousness that ease and luxury are not *all* man wants; these thoughts suggested themselves vaguely to Trafford as he gazed out into the clear winter's night. He was by no means a pattern man, and he had generally the credit of being a cool hand; but his coolness appertained more to the head than to the heart, and probably the quietness of strength contributed to the inaction at which his friend Bolton grumbled so much. He cared so little for the opinion of others that mere applause never possessed much value to him; and he had, perhaps in an unusual degree, the old Greek love of beauty in all shapes—of form, of feeling, colour, thought; the loftiest success, if dry and cold and unsympathetic, possessed no charm for him, and even in the first ferment of youth, passion with him was always largely tinged with sentiment; so probably his life had been purer than that of many. This inherent tenderness of disposition was preserved from decaying into weakness by the salt of genuine English pluck and energy, of which he possessed a full share.

> 'Ye stars! which are the poetry of heaven!
> If in your bright leaves we would read the fate
> Of men and empires, 'tis to be forgiven,'—

murmured Trafford as he closed the window and drew a chair to the fire he had just reviled. 'I wish I could steal a hint or two from their "bright leaves," for I have a wonderful foreboding of evil. Madame de Beaumanoir at Southam! only three or four miles off. What can have induced her to come? She is not in love with Dick Neville? Her friendship for Lady Brockhurst is of

course, bosh. She is a revengeful devil, I am certain of that. I always knew there was a dash of the fiend in her, even when I was in love—and that did not last long. She must remember, too, that it was she sent me adrift—not I that broke loose. I was a mere youngster then; but if, as I suspected at Paris, she has an old *tendresse* or a fresh whim in my favour, she will remember Maggie's face, and finding her here with a relation of mine, what mischief will she not conjure up out of the evil treasure of her experience! Nor will she stop there. What mischief she can do with Margaret —with the Countess! By heaven, it is appalling! I would give a great deal her eyes had never fallen on Maggie; proud, soft, brave soul! How indignantly she puts aside every indication of sympathy from me! And *how* she could love! But thank God she does not. It is impossible she can care for that cousin; yet she looked sad enough in the study. If I thought she had given *me* her heart, I should be tempted—' He paused and lit a cigar. 'And when this wild longing for her had passed away, as of course it would, should I not regret such a *mésalliance?* and would she not perceive it, with her marvellously quick intuition? The last state of that woman would be worse than the first. Of course it is all a piece of folly. I must hug myself in my rank and comparative riches and secure position, and let that tender child drift away among the breakers, to be bruised by the waves or starved on some desolate island of uncongenial life, while I would give years of mine at this moment to hold her in my arms, and——I am growing a mere driveller, without pluck to do one thing or the other. At any rate, I will *not* quit this till I see that handsome black-browed Marquise safe away. How to deal with her is the difficulty. To ask her to hold her tongue would be madness. She would not do it; and it would look as if there was something wrong in our innocent expedition. To tell her Maggie was here would be insane, and not to tell her seems as bad. If she could be kept from seeing Miss Grey—but that, I am afraid, is impossible. I wish to heaven I had had the sense to talk about our drive in the Bois de Boulogne to Margaret; she would think no evil; but told as Madame la Marquise will tell it, she would be more than an angel—an idiot, if she did not suspect mischief. And Maggie must not know anything. I will just ride over and pay Valérie a long visit, and find what she is about, if I can. And I will be as careful here as a prowling cat. It was all my fault, that dangerous, delicious drive, and I must pull Maggie through, somehow.'

The next morning was wet. Miss Grantham came into Maggie's room before breakfast, and sat down by the fire, evidently meaning to indulge in a gossip.

'Our party will not break up so soon, after all,' she said, after yawning at the fire awhile. 'Poor Mr Belton has a fit of the gout; he could not come down to breakfast, and we have sent to Castleton for the doctor. Mr Trafford begged leave to stay last night, after rowing and declaring he must and would go to town on Wednesday. I told him he was growing quite spoilt and whimsical. He is a good deal changed.'

'For the better or worse?' asked Maggie, as Miss Grantham paused.

'I hardly know. He is sceptical and cold and sneering sometimes, but I believe there is a heart as *good* somewhere. You know he is immensely clever. But he is so careless and fond of doing such out-of-the-way things, &c.; and Miss Grantham ran on with a picturesque description of Trafford's life, which would have really amused the subject thereof could he have heard it, but to which Maggie listened with an unbroken faith and an *unwaying* attention most encouraging to her informant.

'*We* and I were always great friends,' she concluded; 'but while he was away in India and Canada we almost forgot each other till we met last autumn at Craigmurchan Castle, just after he returned from Paris—where I always fancied he went to get Torchester out of some scrape. You thought so too, did you not?'

'Yes,' said Maggie, hardly able to keep back a smile. 'I am afraid Lord Torchester was among a bad gambling set there.'

'Tor is wonderfully improved,' replied Miss Grantham. 'Whatever set he was among at Paris roused him up and did him good. He was the shyest, sulkiest boy you can imagine; now he is really bearable, and I should be very fond of him and cultivate him more than I do, only I am afraid of his falling in love with me.'

'I would not trouble about that,' cried Maggie, laughing, 'for it is *un fait accompli* already.'

'You really think so?' said Miss Grantham calmly. 'I fancy it is only dawning. I should not like to vex Tor, and then Lady Torchester has always been so kind. I must send him away; but Miss Grey, as you are evidently an observer, I must some day ask you, merely as a matter of curiosity, if you think—there is that horrid bell! We will have a quiet talk next week, when every one is gone.'

By luncheon time the clouds had broken, and there was some promise of a fine afternoon. Trafford announced that he was going to call on Madame de Beaumanoir. Miss Grantham invited the other gentlemen to ride with her to the kennels and ascertain what were the arrangements for to-morrow, and the party separated.

As Trafford approached the park gates Lady Brockhurst's carriage issued through them, and the Viscountess stopped to exchange greetings with him.

'You will find dear Madame de Beaumanoir at home, if she is equal to seeing you. She has a cold, or a *migraine*, or something, but insisted on our going on just as usual. She wants so much to see the hounds throw off to-morrow. You can tell her all about it.'

After waiting for a few minutes in the Viscountess's luxurious morning-room, a benign butler informed him that Madame de Beaumanoir would see him, and he was conducted to 'my lady's' boudoir—a delicious sanctuary, all white and gold, with rose-coloured blinds, the air heavy with the perfume of rare plants, and glowing with brilliant water-colour sketches, while sofas and couches and ottomans and cushions—a very wealth of comfort—were scattered over the apartment. In a few minutes Madame la Marquise entered. She was elaborately got up as an invalid; a long *robe de chambre* of maize-coloured French merino, bordered with velvet of the same colour, brought out her splendid eyes and brunette tints most effectively, and thrown over all—the crimson-lined hood drawn partly over her head—was a black velvet mantle, edged with deep bands of darkest sable.

'So you have actually taken the trouble to come and see me?' said Madame de Beaumanoir, sinking down, as if hardly able to sustain herself, upon a sofa, and holding out a jeweled hand.

'Taken the trouble!' repeated Trafford expressively, as he bowed over it. 'When the astounding intelligence reached me last evening that you, the cynosure of all Parisian eyes—I should say civilised European eyes—were absolutely irradiating this remote and savage district I was ready to mount and ride then and there—only it would have gained me the character of a lunatic, and perhaps displeased you.'

'*Sans doute*,' she replied, a smile breaking slowly all over her countenance and glittering in her eyes. 'The first duty of man, educated man, is a regard for the *bienséances*. And so you were glad to know I was here, Trafford?'

'It is impossible to describe what I felt,' replied Trafford, with

much [illegible]. 'But what can possibly have induced you to undertake such a journey, *belle mère*? Surely you did not think Lady Brechinoux so inconsolable for the temporary loss of her lord that you must make such a sacrifice to friendship?'

Madame de Beaumanoir laughed gaily. 'I had to come, mon ami.'

'Why, for heaven's sake?'

The Marquise looked full at him, and then, slowly dropping her great eyes to the carpet, said softly, 'A whim.'

'Well, it is a fortunate whim for Southam and Grantham too! but I fear you will soon be bored. I do not think English country-house life will suit you.'

'I have been here one, two, three days, and I am not tired. Then I want to see a hunt of the fox. I mount on horseback well: but you will accompany me, will you not?'

'Certainly. There is a meet to-morrow, not very far, if you are well enough.'

'Oh yes: I shall be well to-morrow. My indisposition is more of the spirit than the body—that sense of desolation, Trafford, which will creep over me as of old.'

Trafford therefore addressed himself to the task of cheering and comforting the charming victim, assuring her of his devoted friendship, his sympathy, &c., and was almost alarmed at his own success.

'Now tell me of your own affairs,' said Madame de Beaumanoir, quite animated and revived. 'Who is this charming Miss Grantham, who, in your strange fashion, rides about with a young gentleman, unaccompanied by any chaperone?'

'She is a charming young lady, whom I have known since before even her schoolroom days; a near cousin of Lord Torchester's; and noble—at least her large landed property would make her a baroness or a countess in France.'

'Well; and are you going to range yourself and marry her, my friend?'

'Why, beautiful lady, I need not range myself; I am exemplary enough. And as to marrying Miss Grantham—no. There is no likelihood of such a thing.'

'It would be well for thy fortunes,' said Madame de Beaumanoir, dropping tenderly into the *tu, toi*.

'Nevertheless, hearts are rebellious sometimes,' returned Trafford carelessly.

'Then you do not love this great blue-eyed girl?' she rejoined, looking at him intently, almost fiercely.

'Not in the least,' said Trafford smiling, 'in your sense, though I am very fond of her.'

'Ah! *mon Dieu!* but how you *could* love, Trafford!'

'I am not so sure of that. I have grown philosophic since you broke my heart and sent me adrift—let me see—oh! I cannot remember how long ago.'

Madame de Beaumanoir pressed her handkerchief to her eyes and murmured, 'Don't talk of it. I was young and inexperienced myself, then. I did not know the value of true, devoted, chivalrous friendship. Ah! how bitter it is to reflect on the errors, the losses, of the past.'

'Inexperienced!' thought Trafford, with a mental note of admiration. But he said, 'There is enough of life and love left to atone for any past—to you.'

'Is there?' asked the Marquise plaintively. 'But, Trafford, you too must have a heart-history; you have not passed unscathed through all these years?'

'Of course not,' said Trafford with edifying candour. 'And I should immensely like you to know the true history of my heart, *belle* Valérie—forgive me, Madame, if the name by which you dwell in my memory escaped my lips'—Madame de Beaumanoir smiled softly; 'but when,' he continued, 'shall I have a chance again of seeing you alone? You know the system of these country houses. You are plunged in a mob, with dozens of eyes ready to watch, to discover, to proclaim those irrepressible indications of tenderness, friendship—what you will—which their natures are too coarse to comprehend or appreciate. It is the most wonderful piece of good fortune to have found you alone this morning. I will not dwell on the painful restraint of such intercourse. No. You would rebuke me. London — London is the only spot in this semi-enlightened country wherein one can enjoy a rational liberty.'

'When do you return to town?' said la Marquise reflectively.

'May I venture to say that my movements will be regulated by yours?'

'Ah, Trafford! What—how can I reply?'

'That you will not reject the—the chivalrous friendship which is at your command. I had intended leaving to-morrow.'

'They told me so,' murmured Madame de Beaumanoir. 'I can-

not curtail my visit too suddenly; but after a week I shall go to London *en route* to Paris.'

Trafford took her hand, and kissed it with profound respect. 'It is remarkable,' he said with much gravity, 'that I have affairs in London which require my presence there in about a week.'

Madame de Beaumanoir smiled, and left her hand in his. And Trafford was beginning not to know exactly what to do with it, when Lady Brockhurst entered, with a judicious amount of laughing and talking, followed by Lord Alfred St Lawrence and Captain Neville.

Much eloquence was wasted in trying to persuade Trafford to stay to dinner, and then arrangements were made respecting the hunt to-morrow. Trafford promised to return to dinner afterwards, and took charge of an invitation to Miss Grantham to join the party.

'But you must drive over to Grantham one day,' said Lady Brockhurst to her friend. 'It is quite a specimen of an old English place.'

'I want to go and see the Lady of the Land,' said Captain Neville indolently.

'There is really nothing to see,' remarked Trafford. 'Your pictures are far finer here; and in short, Grantham is commonplace enough.'

'Surely you depreciate it as if you were already the owner,' said Lady Brockhurst, laughing, yet casting a keen glance at the speaker. 'We may have a few old masters, but nothing like the unique collection of family portraits Miss Grantham possesses. Yes, Madame la Marquise, you must see Grantham. Good morning, Mr Trafford. Pray tell Lady Torchester I was so sorry not to see her to-day. They were all out when I called.'

'So far so good,' thought Trafford, as he rode home through the closing shades of night. 'I am thankful she made no remark respecting the young *pensionnaire* I was imprudent enough be to seen with. Perhaps she has forgotten about it. No; I fear not. Now, if I draw her away to London, what the deuce shall I do with her? However, difficulties arrange themselves. *Nous verrons*'

CHAPTER XXVII.

On the morrow the west wind blew softly, and the hunting party set out in high spirits. Maggie saw them off, and then returned to her room to peruse a letter directed in Cousin John's writing, which she had not yet had time to open. These riding expeditions roused no particular envy in Maggie's mind—as Mrs Berry's visits to theatres or galleries used to do; anything fast or dashing was quite out of her way. She was a thorough home bird, without a home.

John's letter was but a few lines, expressive of the loss she was to him and the pleasure his visit had afforded him. He enclosed a letter, which he was sorry to say he had brought down with him, but totally forgotten. 'It has already been delayed in the post-office, so I am afraid it will be of rather ancient date by the time you get it,' he concluded. The enclosed letter was crumpled-looking, and directed in a scratchy irregular hand, very like the calligraphy of a 'small account;' yet there was something in it familiar to Maggie's eye. She opened it, and to her sincere delight found it signed 'Sophie de Bragance,' 'Poor dear Mrs Berry!' she almost exclaimed aloud, 'I thought I should never hear of her again,' and she proceeded to read as follows:

'My dear Margaret,—I suppose you think I must be dead and buried by this time; and a good deal better would it be for me if I was, than ruined and miserable as I am. Talk of novels! no novel could be worse than the Count; and yet if it had not been for two vile women he would not be so bad. Well, my dear, when I parted with you I thought I was going to have a fine time and enjoy life really; and the first fortnight or three weeks was uncommon nice. Then he began with his tantrums, and made me quarrel with Mr Dunsford, and draw all my money out of his hands, except a fifteen hundred pounds, which, thank God, there was some difficulty about. We went to Homburg, and lived in the grandest style at the best hotel, dinner parties every day, cards every night—breaking the bank, my dear, every second evening at the saloon—picnics—no end of elegant company. Then a Polish princess turned up, a friend of the Baroness, a most fashionable

charming woman, ever so polite to me; but the upshot was, that by the time the Count got all my poor money into his own hands he had had a turn of bad luck, and away we went to Vienna, and these two women after us. Oh! no words I could put down could describe to you what I went through there! I was put away from my own table, and that Polish woman took my place—there is no use trying to spell her name, I don't know how, and you couldn't say it if I did. She was the greatest—devil—there! I must write it!—that ever walked the earth, except Madame von Garn, she backing the other up, and knowing my husband was mad about her. There's morals for you! I am heartbroken, and hope you'll excuse the writing, for my tears are dropping on the paper, and the pen is like a hair-pin; but I'd like to *tell* it all to you. At last I got afraid they would poison me, so I managed to sell my beautiful carbuncle and diamond set, and escaped to England. I felt I was flying for my life. If it could only be wrote in the "London Journal" I'm sure they would give a good bit of money for it. Dunsford was downright savage with me, and spoke very cruel, and then I came here.' (The letter was dated Eastnor.) 'It is a pretty seaside place, and there are lots of visitors in the summer. But lor! what am I to do on forty pounds a year, used as I have been to the best of company, and no end of outing? It is enough to break any heart;' and you see I am married hard and fast to that good-for-nothing man, so I can have no more chances now. I have been thinking if I could set up a nice boarding-house here; with my knowledge of life and society I could head the table well, and make a connection. What do you say, my dear, to joining me? You were always so quick with the pen. I would pay you five per cent. on the profits, and you know I would have all the risk. Among all the people I have known, I declare you are the only one I can think of as a real friend. I think Mr Dunsford is inclined to help me about the boarding-house. Write to me soon, and say what you think of my plan, and also what you are doing. Lor! what a goose you was to refuse the Earl! What a help you might be to me now! But it was all that Trafford's doing; he did not think us fit to wipe his shoes.

'Write soon, dear. Your attached and unhappy friend,

'SOPHIE DE BRAGANCE.

'P.S. Five per cent. is just a shilling in the pound—mind that.'

Maggie perused this epistle with the deepest interest. Foolish and commonplace as she was, Maggie could not help thinking of the writer with compassion and sympathy. It was to Mrs Berry she owed her first emancipation—her escape from Aunt Grey, and the degrading servitude in Beverly Street. She would have given a good deal to assist her ex-patroness; but to return to her was impossible. After her three months' acclimatisation in an atmosphere so utterly different, so far purer, she could not go back to Mrs Berry. 'Yet where may I not have to go hereafter, when Miss Grantham does not want me any longer?' she thought rather sadly. 'And she really does not want me in the least. I feel quite weary for want of occupation sometimes. I wonder what will become of me. Ah! there is no use in going to meet trouble half way. I must have faith.'

She sat down and wrote a long letter to the unhappy Countess, who had paid so dear for her empty title, and begged her not to let the correspondence drop.

This letter helped her over the day. Nevertheless, both it and the evening were dull, in the absence of the bright mistress of the mansion and her followers.

'Can you play backgammon, or piquet, or écarté?' asked Miss Grantham, coming suddenly into the study where Maggie was writing answers to some of the many appeals and formal letters which inundated the heiress. It was two or three days after Mr Bolton's attack, and Maggie had scarcely seen her in the intermediate time.

'Yes,' replied Maggie, 'I can play backgammon and écarté—the last not very well.'

'You must come and play with Mr Bolton, then, if you will be so kind. He is better, and able to move into another room, but so low and miserable! Mr Trafford says a little society would do him good. He is fond of games, but I have too much to do to pay him more than flying visits, and Mr Trafford is quite engrossed; so you must supply our deficiencies.'

Maggie rose obediently, feeling, from a sort of bitterness in Miss Grantham's tone, that something was wrong.

Mr Bolton was laid up in ordinary in a very comfortable room in the opposite wing, corresponding to Miss Grantham's study. He looked anything but amiable. He could not rise to receive the ladies, for his foot, wrapped up in flannel, was propped up on one of those mysterious red-baize-covered contrivances which are the official indication of 'Gout in possession.'

'So sorry you are suffering, Mr Bolton. But you are better this morning, I hear. I have brought Miss Grey, who is anxious to do anything she can in your service—play cards, read, write, or even arithmetic. I cannot bear to think of your being shut up here all alone,' said Miss Grantham.

Maggie felt no small terror at being compelled to share his solitude. Mr Bolton was the only one of all the party who was not genially civil to her, and she had an idea he disliked her.

'I should be glad to be of any use,' said she timidly.

'You are very good,' returned Bolton, with a sort of suppressed growl. 'I have managed a letter to Mr Lee, but I feel twinges in my right hand; the fact is, I am not fit for any lady's society, and will mope here very well by myself. I should like to see Mr Trafford before he goes out.'

'Mr Trafford?' echoed Miss Grantham, laughing. 'You must not expect to see him; he lives at Southam now; they certainly have a charming party, and the most effective of French women. I wish you could have seen her "get up" on Wednesday! There is another meet to-day, and she is to appear, so Geoff is in attendance; they are old friends, however. He knew her long ago, and they renewed their acquaintance last spring. She is coming over here one morning; you must be well and see her.'

'If I can stand, my dear young lady, I must travel. I have been too long absent from my post.'

After a little further talk Miss Grantham rose, and bestowing a significant look on Maggie to remain, she left the room.

'Are you quite sure you would rather *not* have me?' said she, with a blush and smile, to the invalid. There was something so kindly, so candid, so simple in her manner, that the formidable Bolton melted.

'If you will be so good, then. The fact is, I want to know what is in the papers, and I do not feel quite up to reading.'

'I shall read with pleasure,' and she sat down contentedly.

Maggie Grey had not only a pleasant expressive voice, but was generally interested in whatever she read, and so read intelligently; occasionally she ventured to put a question, which Mr Bolton was well pleased to answer, and soon, somewhat to his own surprise, found himself talking with a good deal of interest and animation to 'that little girl Miss Grantham is pleased to call her secretary.'

Nor was this objectionable morsel of humanity quite divested of ideas and opinions, which though modestly put forth, were not

readily relinquished. Then she amused him by a description of Lord Torchester's French friends, speaking with unembarrassed frankness, for she had no idea the family solicitor was acquainted with the Earl's temporary insanity and its disappointment.

Finally, Mr Bolton's subjugation was completed by Maggie's proficiency in backgammon, and her kindly unobtrusive sympathy whenever a paroxysm of pain seized the sufferer.

No day passed without a message reaching Maggie that Mr Bolton would be much obliged if she could pay him a visit after luncheon or after breakfast; and in short, she now seemed to belong to Mr Bolton; she scarcely saw Miss Grantham, and was angry with herself for feeling so keenly that she was of no importance to that fascinating lady—merely one of her many whims; although, when she joined the party after dinner, Miss Grantham was as kind and cordial as ever. But their numbers were now diminished by the departure of Lady Torchester, who had returned to her own home and more congenial society; the stout Colonel had also disappeared, and possibly the contraction of the circle made the conduct of each member more remarkable, for it seemed to her that Trafford never spoke to her or noticed her. He was always engaged with some one or something. He was never uncivil or careless, but wonderfully preoccupied. However, she had no right to notice his proceedings or shortcomings. Then he was frequently at Southam, and she was much engaged with the invalid.

Maggie had read Mr Bolton into a tranquil nap one morning, a few days after Lady Torchester had left. The sun was shining brightly, and all the world of Grantham was out disporting itself. She slipped noiselessly from the room, and wrapping herself up warmly, set out for a solitary ramble through the leafless woods. The keen clear air, and the exercise she so much required, seemed to revive her, for she had felt at starting unusually depressed. She imagined how lovely the scenery must be in summer, when even in winter it was so pleasant; and she enjoyed occasionally startling a pheasant as it rose with a sudden whirr. Youth has so many delights when it is healthy and natural, mere life itself is a feast. And so, thinking of the past a little, and somewhat shrinking from the future, she strove to keep her thoughts in order by employing them on the books she had read of late, for her command of the Grantham library had been another education for her. 'I hope I shall not forget how to speak French,' she thought. 'I am so sorry I

did not see that French lady when she came yesterday. I might have spoken to her; but it was worse to be totally overlooked. How foolish it is of me to fancy myself anything more than a secretary to Miss Grantham, kind and good as she is! It is impossible she could care for me as I could for her; she has so many people to love her, she attracts so much. Surely it must be distracting to be such a millionnaire in every sense! I do not envy it. A sweet, quiet home, and just two or three people very near and dear, to love and live for——Ah! that was too close!'

A shot on her right—it seemed in her ear—made her start, and she went on quickly and diverged in another direction—then paused and listened. But not hearing a repetition, and being unacquainted with the path into which she had struck, she determined to go back slowly, and if she heard no more, to return to the house at once by the way she knew. Before she had regained it, however, she perceived a gentleman walking quickly through the trees, not following any path, and it did not require a second look to tell her it was Mr Trafford. She was vexed and fluttered at the encounter. She had been annoyed and disappointed by his conduct of late. He had so entirely occupied the pedestal of her hero-in-chief that it was mortifying to find he could be so attracted by a married woman—a worldly, intriguing Frenchwoman, as Miss Grantham described her—as to neglect almost the courtesy due to his hostess! Poor Maggie had not yet reached that degree of maturity when we comprehend that there is no such thing as clearly defined boundary lines in character; that dark and light shade off into each other in infinitely minute gradations. Her standard was a very high one—as it ought to be in young creatures who have yet to bear the brunt of life's contact.

'I have not winged you then, Miss Grey?' said Trafford, raising his hat as he met her. 'I saw a human figure through the trees just as I fired last, and feared I might have hit nobler game than the bird I missed.'

'I am quite safe; but I was startled, and so turned from the only path I know. If it is safe I shall now return.'

'Yes, it is safe; but let me guide you by this wood back to the house—it's very pretty, and scarcely longer.'

'Thank you; but you are leaving your sport; you will be missed.

'No; there was no one with me except the gamekeeper, and I have dismissed him. I am going back to see Mr Bolton, whose

favour I seem to have lost lately. Pray let me accompany you; want to speak to you.'

There had been a time when such words from Trafford would have made Maggie's heart beat; but she had so shamed herself out of the faint idea that had once entered in and dwelt there—the idea that he had any feeling beyond kindly good will—that she now looked straight up in his face with an expression of unbounded astonishment. Trafford smiled as he met her eyes, satisfied of her absolute freedom from any tenderness for him, or she could never have so listened to his words, and noted how her countenance had grown softer, more pensive, nay, almost sad, since he had first seen it—that from some cause or other, there was more attraction about it than ever.

'Why are you astonished that I want to speak to you, Miss Grey? I always had a great deal to say to you in Paris; and *there* you rather honoured me with your confidence.'

'It seemed quite natural there,' replied Maggie, blushing a little; 'here it is different, and I am happier. But what do you want to say now?'

Trafford felt greatly puzzled how to proceed. Everything had so far been propitious beyond his hopes; could he but improve his present opportunity complete success might crown his efforts. Such a wonderful chance as meeting Maggie out alone, however, could not be lost, so he collected his thoughts and dashed into his subject.

'Something quite as confidential as if I was in the lowest depths of despair, instead of being as joyous as you say *you* are. Do you know that the Southam party are coming over to dinner on Friday?—that is, Lady Brockhurst, Mme de Beaumanoir, Neville, St Lawrence, and the German fellow?'

'No, I did not. If Miss Grantham wishes me to come down in the evening I shall like to see that French lady you have all talked about so much. I remember your taking Lord Torchester to her house, much against his will.'

'I dare say you do; and *why* it was against his will. Now, I am going to take a great liberty in asking you as a personal favour not to appear on Friday, even if Miss Grantham asks you.'

'How can I refuse her?' exclaimed Maggie, more and more astonished.

'Say you are ill—a headache, a cold, anything; go to bed if necessary, but don't show,' said Trafford, with more earnestness of manner than he had shown for many a day.

'But why? What objection can you possibly have to my appearing?'

'Come, Miss Grey, could you not trust my motives without an explanation? You must believe that—I—am your sincere friend?'

'Yes, I do; that is, you are very kind,' said Maggie, quite dazed by this sudden show of interest so delightfully like their former intercourse, and glancing up a sweet shy grateful glance.

'Well, then, will you trust me, and do as I ask you?'

'I feel almost tempted to do so, Mr Trafford,' said Maggie, gravely. 'But will you not tell me the reason why? When I am all alone I shall imagine horrors; it would be better to tell me. I am not easily offended.'

'I am not so sure of that,' said Trafford, while he thought of the reasonableness of her request, and the old tender longing to save her pain, if possible, came over him. He sought rapidly and eagerly some decent pretext. Suddenly a happy inspiration crossed his mind—Lord Alfred St Lawrence's letter, in which he described his meeting with Torchester and a very nice girl, 'all alone by themselves.' Yes, it was the very thing. 'I sometimes think you are a little quarrelsome; however, promise on this occasion to take what I am going to say in good part, and I will make a clean breast of it.'

'Pray do; it will be much the best plan.'

'Well, I think when we had a little talk on the subject, you wished poor Torchester's disappointment as regards yourself should be kept a profound secret?'

'Certainly; and is it not?'

'So far, yes. Now do you remember going to Versailles with Torchester one day to a fête, and dining with him—I mean a whole party—afterwards?'

'Yes,' said Maggie, bathed in blushes. 'I had no idea then that it was such a breach of the proprieties. I have learnt much since.'

Trafford was silent for a moment, and then resumed, 'Do you remember meeting a young Englishman in the train, who——'

'Dined with us—a pleasant fair little man? I remember him perfectly,' interrupted Maggie.

'Well, he is Lord Alfred St Lawrence; and probably the first thing he would say on meeting you would be some reminder of your having been at Versailles with Torchester, partly to chaff Tor.'

'But,' said Maggie, still a little bewildered, 'he would not probably remember me.'

'He would,' said Trafford, emphatically. 'He wrote to me about you before I ever saw you, and——'

'Ah! I see,' cried Maggie, clasping her hands together in much perturbation. 'It must have seemed very wrong to be out alone with a man of Lord Torchester's rank. What must he have thought?' And as she spoke her eyes met Trafford's—a deep blush flitted over her face; his heart beat quick. Both at once thought of another *tête-à-tête* expedition, too delightful to be talked about.

'You exaggerate terribly,' said Trafford, adding, with a suppressed tenderness of which he was unconscious, 'no one could know you and think evil; but, as it is, perhaps it would be as well that poor Torchester's experiences should be buried in oblivion. You see the force of my suggestion, but of course you will do as you think fit.'

'I shall certainly *act* as you suggest,' said Maggie, quickly, 'for I feel scarcely capable of judging such a question. I am only learning the A B C of social life. Six months ago I did not comprehend its enormous distances, and I must say I feel infinitely provoked at being compelled to use the smallest deceit about so paltry a matter. I am quite sure it is of more importance than you admit.'

'It is not, I assure you; but one day I shall be able to explain things to you more fully, meantime I may depend upon——'

'My staying in my room under false pretences?' interrupted Maggie. 'Yes, you may.'

'Thank you.'

'Nay,' said Maggie; 'I ought probably to thank you,' and they walked on for a few minutes in silence.

'I am going up to town on Monday,' said Trafford, rather abruptly, 'and I believe the Southam party disperse on Tuesday or Wednesday.'

'I am glad of it—I mean about Lady Brockhurst's friends,' added Maggie, smiling at her inadvertence; 'for I do not think Miss Grantham has been any the happier for them. I think she looked twice as bright before they came.'

'Did she?' said Trafford, indifferently.

Another pause ensued, during which Trafford thought he probably ought to wish his companion good morning; but no, he

would go a little further. It was so delightfully like their pleasant Paris intercourse. There could be no possible mischief. And Maggie reflected in a troubled tangled fashion what could possibly make Mr Trafford so earnest and eager that she should avoid Lord Alfred; surely there was something more in it than she could make out; at any rate, he cared enough for her to take a little trouble, and this impression sent a sudden life and animation through her whole being that she did not stop to analyse just then. Paris was present to her memory also, and out of the quick blending current of associated ideas she suddenly broke the silence by exclaiming: 'I had a long letter from poor Mrs Berry—I mean Madame de Bragance—on Wednesday. She gives me a dreadful account of the Count,' and Maggie proceeded to describe Mrs Berry's misfortunes.

'What an unprincipled scoundrel!' exclaimed Trafford, at last. 'She was an utter idiot to be taken in by him; but she did not deserve such treatment. Can you not fancy her heading the table at a fashionable boarding-house? I believe there are such places. I protest I will persuade Tor to come down with me next summer and put up with her at—what is the name of the place? And, Miss Grey, tell her to call her house the *Hôtel de Bragance*—it will be quite a success. How did she find you out?'

'Oh, my cousin forwarded the letter.'

'Of course. I suppose he is a tolerable correspondent?'

'He gives me one letter for every two of mine,' returned Maggie, with a slight smile. 'But then you know he is busy, and I am idle.'

'Idle?' repeated Trafford, indulging in a long look at her face, now lit up into quite a different expression from the composed, pensive, half-melancholy countenance he had so often noticed during those long evenings when he did not seem to see her. 'Idle? Why with a demi-semi share in the weight of authorship, how can you be idle? What has become of the novel?'

'Ah! it has stood still since Lady Brockhurst appeared, though I imagine the French lady Miss Grantham describes would come in admirably.'

'Indeed! Why?' asked Trafford.

'She must be so handsome and dark, and would do for the wicked woman.'

'Poor Madame de Beaumanoir! what has she done?' said Trafford, laughing.

'Nothing very bad, I dare say,' returned Maggie. 'But Miss Grantham's description of her has made quite an impression on my mind. I am so sorry I shall miss seeing her on Friday, by obeying you,' and she glanced up to him interrogatively.

'Yes, you must,' said Trafford, meeting her eyes with a look half tender, half entreating. 'You will put so much faith in me?'

'I will,' returned Maggie, feeling that had the 'I will' committed her to a far more tremendous sacrifice she would have spoken it. 'I fancy, however, I have seen Madame de Beaumanoir,' resumed Maggie.

'Indeed! Where?' said Trafford, in no small surprise.

'At the Hôtel de Ville.'

'At *the* ball?'

'Yes,' said Maggie, smiling that he should italicise *the* ball. 'Is she not a tall graceful lady, with an air as though *she* might sit still, for everything must come to her, and great large lustrous black eyes?'

'Exactly, precisely; you have photographed her. How did you know her? You are a keen observer.'

'I had heard you speak of her, then I saw you speaking *to* her in the small *salon* opening from the ball-room, and I felt it was Madame de Beaumanoir.' Maggie was unconscious of all her words conveyed; she simply told her impressions and recollections, as clearly as she could, but for long afterwards those words echoed in Trafford's heart: 'I felt it was Madame de Beaumanoir.'

'Well, you have the less to regret on Friday, and I would advise you to write a chapter about her at once; she will enliven your novel immensely.' Maggie would have been greatly puzzled to account for the conviction that flashed across her, that Trafford neither liked nor respected Madame de Beaumanoir; something in his tone, something in the curl of his lip, and more than all, the strange instinctive sympathy which was ever present between them to reveal each to the other.

'I miss one of my dogs,' said Trafford, abruptly. 'I must go back and find him;' he felt he must not go on talking and listening. 'Shall you see Bolton when you go in? Pray tell him I am coming to pay him a visit before dinner;' and, raising his hat, Trafford let Maggie pass on.

Maggie found the interesting invalid in a mode of suppressed testiness, for Miss Grantham, in her riding habit, was paying him a visit, and with all his independence of spirit Bolton felt himself

compelled to be observant and deferential to the *grande dame*, the great heiress of Grantham.

'Have you had a nice walk, Miss Grey?' said the *châtelaine*. 'I seem scarcely to see you, since I lent you to Mr Bolton.'

'I have greatly enjoyed it,' replied Maggie, feeling strangely reluctant to mention her rencontre; but determined to do so, she went on, addressing Bolton: 'I met Mr Trafford, and he desired me to say he was coming to see you before dinner.'

'He is very good,' growled the gouty subject.

'I fancied Mr Trafford was at Southam, as usual,' said Miss Grantham, with a slight change in the inflexion of her voice, which caught Maggie's affectionate notice.

'I do not think he has been there to-day,' said Maggie laughing; 'he was shooting, and nearly shot me—then he told me he would return and see Mr Bolton. I did not think any of the gentlemen were out in the woods, or I should not have ventured there.'

So saying, she rose and left Miss Grantham with Mr Bolton, to await, as she thought it probable she would, the coming of her favoured kinsman.

When Maggie reached the welcome solitude of her own room, she set herself to think very profoundly of her conversation with Trafford. The first and most prominent impression was wounded pride. That it should be considered so derogatory to her to have been seen alone with Lord Torchester, though merely going to meet her chaperone and a large party was wormwood to her proud sensitive nature; yet it must be so, or a man like Mr Trafford, so calm, so cognisant of the real value of things, would not have taken all the trouble he did. And how good it was of him! How true he was to her! All the truer and worthier of regard, because he never for a moment approached love-making—nothing of the 'humbug' against which Cousin John warned her. Nevertheless, the whole affair was humiliating, and it was very provoking to reflect that while the society of these pleasant kindly men, with their well-bred readiness to oblige and unobtrusive delicate flattery of manner, which, however little it might mean, possessed so great a charm, was forbidden to her, on the other hand, the honest affection of a man, for whose character she could not help feeling a certain respect, was utterly distasteful for want of those outward symbols, which she was by no means sure were the certain sign of an equivalent inward grace. 'Still,' she thought, 'if Mr Trafford's life had been ever so rough, he never could be like Cousin John·

there is something quite different in him. Lord Torchester might have been; under his careless quiet ways there is a world of pride and conceit; but I do like him; nevertheless, I do not feel that he is in the slightest degree too good or too great to associate with me. The only one I feel to be my superior is Miss Grantham, and she *is*. She is so good, so generous, so grand and beautiful. She is almost fond of me too, and I do hate to deceive her in the very least thing; yet it is as well she should not know that Lord Torchester was ever so silly as to propose for me—what could he have been thinking about? I had better do as Mr Trafford advises me.'

In pursuance of this decision, Maggie discovered she had a headache and slight cold, after reading and playing backgammon with Mr Bolton for a considerable part of the next day; so retired, having tormented herself into a state of discomfort not far short of the indisposition she affected.

'You are really looking unwell and headachy,' said Miss Grantham, when Maggie went to her dressing-room, as was her habit before dinner. 'Pray do not think of coming down this evening if you do not feel quite equal to it; but try and be well to-morrow, for some of the Southam party are coming over to dinner.'

'You will want me to play for you,' faltered Maggie, feeling the guiltiest wretch on earth.

'Not on that account,' replied Miss Grantham. 'Lady Brockhurst plays very well and is most obliging. But I want you to see la Marquise de Beaumanoir, that we may talk of her and compare notes; she is a handsome witch. I cannot like her. Geoffrey Trafford seems perfectly unlike himself since she came. But we will discuss all that the day after to-morrow. If you are laid up, what will Mr Bolton do? He would hardly have you at first, and now he evidently thinks himself ill-used if you snatch an hour's walk.'

'Oh! I shall manage to read to him.'

'No, no. Keep yourself up for the evening.'

Maggie therefore secluded herself, and never did she feel so desolate, so divested of all ties. If Cousin John had been anything bearable, her heart would have turned to him in such an hour. But he was not; and in spite of her most determined efforts, Trafford's look and tone at that terrible moment when he bid her good-bye in Paris, his words, the sort of impulse with which he turned back to say, 'Should you be in any trouble or difficulty

promise to write to me—promise me this, dear Maggie;' would come back to her with a mingled pain and delight. Yes; great and remote and unapproachable as he was, some mysterious link of sympathy existed between them. And then that delightful drive to the Bois de Boulogne, to which he never made the smallest allusion; *that*, at all events, was a secret known to themselves alone.

After listening awhile to the distant sounds of music and laughter, which came to her at intervals when the doors of the rooms down-stairs opened, Maggie went sadly to bed, and fell asleep, planning an ideal home—very sweet and humble, framed out of dear memories of the old one and certain lessons since laid deeply to heart. But alas! there was no well-defined object to share it with her; only a very misty outline, with dark eyes and a grave tender smile. Even from this she strove to turn away; and so, fighting wearily against such foolish fancies, she passed into real dreamland, with the tears on the long lashes which were one of her few claims to beauty.

It was late in the afternoon of the day following the dinner-party that Miss Grantham came into Maggie's sitting-room, her hat in her hand; and, throwing off a thick mantle, she sat down on a low chair before the fire. 'Are you better, Miss Grey? I was so sorry you were not able to join us last night.'

'Had you a pleasant dinner?'

'Yes—very—quite a success, the people seemed to think. I was very tired. I do wish you had seen Madame de Beaumanoir; she was quite a picture. She wore ruby velvet, with a square corsage and such superb old white point, carbuncle and diamond ornaments, and one great red rose, with a diamond heart in her hair. Nothing could be more effective. And then she is so calm and still, as if there to receive homage; yet, with all her quiet, she gives me the idea of a smouldering fire. I wonder why Lady Brockhurst likes her so much? She has none of the airy grace of a Frenchwoman. I could fancy one of those grand, wicked Italian women we read of. I do wish you had seen her.'

'I wish I had; but I was better in my room.'

'Lady Brockhurst was so pretty and charming; and Aunt Dormer kept wide awake. But you would have been amused at the way Madame de Beaumanoir tries to put me back into my place as a *demoiselle*. She expressed, in her gentle way, her compassion for

my desolate position as an unmarried woman, without an assured stand in society. It was very politely veiled, but that was the sum of it; and I must say Geoffrey stood by me gallantly. He said, "You must make allowance for English habits. We, Miss Grantham's devoted adherents, believe she can stand alone, though each and all hope she will not." Now that was very good, for I am sure *he* does not seem to care much about it. The way he has run after Madame de Beaumanoir is perfectly scandalous. Have you not seen a great change in him since she was here?'

'Yes; I think I do.'

'Now, I know you observe keenly, Miss Grey—and—and'—the proud heiress blushed and hesitated—'I think you are a true-hearted girl and fond of me; if I open my mind to you, you will not betray me? For, do you know, I have no one to speak to confidentially. I used to tell Lady Brockhurst everything; but I do not feel as if I could now.'

'If I could be the smallest use or comfort to you,' cried Maggie, enthusiastically, 'it would make me so happy; and indeed you may trust me.'

'I believe it,' said Miss Grantham, and then kept silence for a long time, as it seemed to her listener.

'I never remember the world without Geoffrey Trafford,' began the heiress, in a low dreamy tone. 'You see he was quite grown up—a man—when Torchester and I were children, and looked older than he is. There was always a sort of importance about him; I do not know why; not of his own seeking. Grandpapa thought so much of him; and Lady Torchester—every one. He was quite run after in London, I have been told. When he was down here, if I was naughty (and I *was* generally), he would sometimes speak to me a few stern words that made me quite ashamed of myself. But usually he was so gentle. I used to sit on his knee in those days, and kiss him, and put my head on his shoulder.' The beautiful heiress smiled and blushed as she spoke, while her companion coloured from sympathy. 'Even then,' resumed Miss Grantham, 'I determined to marry Geoffrey Trafford; and indeed I imagined I had only to will it—I was so accustomed to get everything I wanted. Well, then he took to the wandering life that vexes poor Mr Bolton so much, and I saw very little of him; indeed, we had not met at all for four years, and I had quite ceased to think of him, when he came over to Craigmurchan Castle last autumn, while I was staying there. I had been growing quite sick

of every one, they made such a fuss about me, and I *was* so pleased to see Geoff. He was not nearly so good-looking as he had been, he had grown very dark and thin; but, oh! he was just the same to me, and the moment we met I *felt* just the same. He was as kind and gentle as ever, but I could not play tricks and coquette with him; a word always brought me to my senses. And then he was so calm; I always felt him an unattainable good, and it was so provoking that the only thing on earth I cared much about I could not get. Ah! I cannot tell you what I have suffered. He and Torchester went away to St Petersburg, and I was wretched and restless till we met in London, and then I was so happy! He seemed quite pleased to come down here. We were always together, and though he never made love to me, he never would have stayed on here for three weeks unless there was some extraordinary attraction. I used to fancy that my being so rich kept him back, for I believe he is rather poor, and he is proud and peculiar. I think the secret of his importance is, that he does not value what other people do; he has no price, in short. Every one will hear the truth from him. Ah!' cried the heiress, suddenly clasping Maggie's hands, 'I would give all I have and hope for, just to hear Geoffrey ask me to love him, and see him look at me as I know he could look.' Then covering her face, she exclaimed, 'It is very shocking to say so, but it is such a comfort! And you will not betray me?'

'No, you may trust me, dearest,' said Maggie, tenderly. All formality had disappeared between them; it was not the noble mistress and the obedient secretary, but woman and woman—sweet nature, free from all masquerade. 'But you must try and not think so much about him,' said Maggie, tremblingly; for something told her that her friend's love was hopeless.

'Why?' cried Miss Grantham, snatching away her hand. 'Do you think I am not to be loved? Do *you* too see his indifference?'

'By no means; I have always seen that he prefers being with you to any one. But remember, there is much of his life you know nothing about. He may have formed some other attachment or engagement. Indeed,' cried Maggie, ardently, 'he *must* have lost his heart before he saw you in Scotland, or he could not have helped falling in love with you.'

'*You* think so, at all events; there is truth in your voice,' said Miss Grantham. She rose and stood before the long glass between the windows. 'It is too dark to see much' she said. 'I am fair

enough; I am not afraid of that; but I am never quite sure I understand Geoffrey. Oh! we were so happy before this odious Frenchwoman appeared! He is quite devoted to her. Do you know, he has only ridden with me once since Christmas Day? and now' (lowering her voice) 'he is going to town on Monday and she is going on Tuesday! You know he had positively refused to remain here a day longer than last Wednesday week, and directly he heard she was here he changed all his plans, and, I believe, is only going because she is. I believe they have settled it between them.'

'But is not this lady married?' asked Maggie, somewhat scandalised.

'Yes, of course she is. Oh! that does not matter. Though I really believe Geoffrey Trafford is very steady, I do not think he would stop at trifles if he wanted anything very much.'

There was a pause, and Maggie said softly: 'It is very curious why he should seem so devoted, for I cannot help fancying that he does not really like Madame de Beaumanoir.'

'Why? why?' asked Miss Grantham eagerly. 'I have some such unaccountable impression myself; that is why I so much wished you to see them together. What are your reasons?'

'Mr Trafford's voice is very expressive,' said Maggie, a little reluctantly, 'and when he says "Madame de Beaumanoir" or "the charming Marquise," there is a little something of impatience or contempt—oh, I cannot describe what—in his voice. And then, the other day, when you were all going to ride somewhere—I forget the name—he was in the hall, and said, "I must go to Southam," as if it were such a punishment.'

'Might that not have been put on?' asked Miss Grantham.

'Oh, no, no!' cried Maggie; 'he spoke out from his heart.'

'You are a shrewd little thing,' returned Miss Grantham. 'But I too think that Madame de Beaumanoir has some hold upon him we cannot understand.' She was silent for a minute, and then resumed: 'After all, I sometimes think Geoffrey is not quite indifferent to me. You must tell me your opinion now that I have spoken so openly; but be sure you give me your real opinion.'

'On such a subject I would not for worlds disguise it,' said Maggie earnestly. 'To me it seems that he *must* love you—that he cannot help it; but it is impossible to say. And oh, dear Miss Grantham, try not to think of him. If he loves any one else, you must put him out of your heart; you must not submit yourself to

the indignity of giving more than you receive. But as to me, say anything and everything; I will never repeat a syllable again, even to my own thoughts, if you wish me not; all shall be sacred to me.

'You are a dear, tender, delicate thing!' cried Miss Grantham. 'You have taken all this just as I like; you don't humiliate me, and it is a comfort to be able to speak to you. I am in your debt for this.'

'Ah!' said Maggie, who had sat down on a low ottoman near her, drawing closer as she spoke, 'if you would love me a little—just a little bit! For I am very lonely.'

'I will,' cried the generous, passionate, indulged heiress, laying her arm on her companion's shoulder. 'You shall be my friend.'

Maggie looked up delighted. The firelight flashed and glowed over the fine form, the grand blue eyes, the rich, disordered golden hair. The protecting attitude of the one, the tender, quiet, slender figure at her feet, with upturned, steadfast, sad eyes—they made a pretty picture; but a discerner of character might, perhaps, have traced more of strength and endurance in the humbler face and form.

'Now it is time to dress,' said Miss Grantham, after a pause, 'and you must come down to dinner to-day as my friend.'

'Oh, no, no! I do not mean that sort of friendship,' said Maggie, smiling brightly; 'nothing can bridge over the space between us. But I mean, when we are alone, or that you have none of your own people with you, that you should consider me a true, faithful friend, if not a very useful one, and just let me do whatever I can for you.'

'I should like you to come down to dinner, though. Why should I not have whom I like?'

'Certainly; but I should prefer to keep in my place, and you would find it awkward to send me back to it, as you would be obliged some day. Be guided by me in this.'

'As you seem so earnest about it, I give in,' said Miss Grantham; 'but I shall certainly expect you in the evening. You can wear a morning dress, if you fear to increase your cold. I really feel brighter and more hopeful since I had this talk with you.

There was but a small party in the green drawing-room that evening. Trafford, however, had for once renounced the seductions of Southam, and bestowed his attention on Miss Grantham, who played piquet with Mr Bolton. It was the first evening for more than a week that Bolton had joined the circle.

'How are you, Miss Grey?' asked Lord Torchester, ranging up alongside. 'So you were on the sick list yesterday? You would have met St Lawrence if you had been able to come down. Don't you remember little Alf.'

'Scarcely,' said Maggie, blushing and trembling at this sudden trenching on forbidden ground, after all she had submitted to to avoid it.

'A fair-haired bright little fellow—dined with us at Versailles. What a jolly day that was!' Lord Torchester began to forget he had absolutely proposed to this quiet little girl, and was only conscious in a kindly way that she was pleasantly unobtrusive, and had evidently kept faith loyally with him.

'It was, indeed,' replied Maggie, looking up, 'a most charming day'—and to change the subject before any one could overhear their conversation, she began to speak of Mrs Berry and her misfortunes. Lord Torchester was quite interested. He was by no means indifferent to gossip, and like Trafford, was highly amused at the idea of her establishing a boarding-house. While they conversed, Miss Grantham's game came to an end, and Mr Bolton said good-night.

'Prudence is the better part of valour, so I shall not trifle with the tyrant; but do not fancy you are to be off duty, Miss Grey. I shall expect a long lecture to-morrow if Miss Grantham can spare you.'

'I am quite at your service, Mr Bolton.'

'Let me help you up-stairs,' said Trafford, good-naturedly.

'Come, Messieurs! Lady Dormer is waiting for her whist,' said Miss Grantham, as they left the room. She spoke with authority, and her listeners felt bound to obey. So all sat down, Maggie having Lord Torchester for a partner.

Trafford stopped to look at the game when he returned, and then joined his hostess, who was reading by the fireside at some distance from the whist table. After exchanging a few remarks they were silent, a feeling of restraint embarrassing both. At last Miss Grantham, whose eyes rested on the whist party, exclaimed warmly and abruptly, 'She is a sweet girl; quite an uncommon character. She has won my heart.'

'Who is this fortunate individual?'

'Miss Grey. I had such a long talk with her to-day. I do not think she is very happy.'

Miss Grantham's words gave Trafford sincere pleasure, though

[illegible] belief in the speaker's stability. He looked [illegible] with a kindly, almost tender expression.

[illegible] lucky to have gained a foothold in such a royal [illegible] always believed *your* heart to be,' he said, in the [illegible] of his pleasant voice; and the heiress of Grantham [illegible] how good a thing life was.

'[illegible] as it is, she has a foothold in it,' she went on. 'And [illegible] cousin of hers, she shall never marry him; she [illegible] I do not think she cares for him.'

'[illegible] ask her?' said Trafford, smiling.

'[illegible] With all her gentleness I could not take liberties with [illegible] That is what I like so much. There is always something to [illegible]

'[illegible] Margaret, I begin to expect wonders from the novel, [illegible] at the prospect of appearing in it. Your percep- [illegible] growing painfully vivid. Our characters are at your [illegible]

'[illegible], Geoff! But I must say I am tempted to take your [illegible] Madame de Beaumanoir, label her "Poison," and give her a [illegible] place in my pages.'

'[illegible] curious the sort of antipathy you seem to have felt to my [illegible] friend from the first. Is there anything that can be [illegible] reason at the bottom of it? Or is it simply constitu- [illegible]?'

'Constitutional, moral, mental, physical—anything you like. [illegible] I am quite sure she hates me.'

'On the contrary,' said Trafford, amused at her earnestness, 'she [illegible] you immensely, and often talks of the grace and beauty [illegible] "Mademoiselle de Grantam," as she calls you. Nothing, I am [illegible] would give her greater pleasure than to dispose of you and [illegible] territories. She considers your relatives terribly negligent of [illegible] duties; and considers Torchester as the most proper and [illegible] alliance for you.'

'Geoffrey!' cried Miss Grantham, her eyes sparkling. 'How dare [illegible] discuss me with that horrid woman? I cannot bear to think [illegible] it!'—the indignant tears sprang to her eyes.

'Margaret,' replied Trafford, more gravely, 'do you not think you might trust your name with me? Who would regard it more tenderly than I? Come! what have I done to vex you lately, eh, Margaret?—for I have *not* been in favour.'

'I do not admit that,' said Miss Grantham, recovering herself. 'You have done nothing to deserve my displeasure.'

Here the whist party showed a desire for change. Mr Longmore thought that dangerous, careless fellow Trafford had enjoyed a long enough *tête-à-tête* with the heiress; and Maggie, feeling unaccountably weary and dreadfully stupid, took advantage of her character as a semi-invalid to retire.

'Take care of yourself,' said Miss Grantham, kindly. 'Be sure you send for nurse to give you one of her famous milk possets.'

Maggie tried in vain to sleep; she had too much food for thought to be successful; every day seemed to bring some subtle change in her inner history, the one which had just closed especially. Though always fighting stoutly against the ever-intrusive ideas of Trafford's words and looks and pleasant voice, which sounded as if it never could adapt itself to anything silly, or coarse, or false; though she struggled against these recollections, and endeavoured, in thought, to keep herself separate from any association with so exalted a personage, she had never known how inextricably he was entwined with every fibre of her heart until that day, when Miss Grantham's confession imperatively demanded her utter renunciation of such sweet vague dreams! He now belonged to her friend, and it was more than probable that the reason assigned by Miss Grantham (Trafford's possible poverty), was the only one which held him back from being her avowed lover. Maggie had never imagined that any of the mighty Traffords could be even comparatively poor; this partially accounted for his seeming indifference to his beautiful kinswoman; and yet—yet, across all her reasoning and resolution came the strong instinctive conviction that he did not love the heiress of Grantham. 'Thank God,' she thought, 'he is going away; I shall be more at rest when he is not here to puzzle me. What could have been his object in wishing me to avoid that Lord Alfred? From the way Lord Torchester spoke, it could not have mattered much whether I met him or not. At all events, Mr Trafford must have meant well. If I doubted that, chaos indeed would be come again!'

Sunday broke through a misty rain, and the three ladies drove solemnly to church, escorted by the correct Grantham Longmore, whom Miss Grantham declared had been christened with a view to his inheriting, by hook or by crook, the family domains.

Lord Torchester and Trafford disappeared at church time, and Mr Bolton had not made his descent.

'What has become of Torchester?' asked Miss Grantham.

'Oh! he and Trafford talked of riding over to Hillsborough, to see some colts that are for sale,' replied Longmore.

Lady Brockhurst and all her party, except Madame de Beaumanoir, were in the family pew, and Miss Grantham, noting the exception, glanced expressively at Maggie.

'You should have brought Madame la Marquise to see an English country church,' said Miss Grantham to the Viscountess, as the two parties joined issue in the porch.

'She was to have come,' said Lady Brockhurst, 'but had letters from Paris—I fancy from the *directeur*, though she is rather *un esprit fort*—so she stayed at home to answer them. I imagine a Protestant temple was tabooed. I shall miss her terribly—she leaves on Tuesday—a most charming person.'

'Exceedingly,' said Miss Grantham. 'I don't believe a word about her being forbidden to enter a Protestant church,' she continued, as soon as they were in the carriage. 'She cares little for church or confession, I suspect.'

'Still, it is possible,' said Maggie. 'Many Frenchwomen are *dévotes* in an odd inconsistent way.'

Trafford was rather late for luncheon, and Miss Grantham remarked, 'I thought you and Tor went over to Hillsborough together?'

'I accompanied him part of the way, but I do not interest myself in colts, as I have no stud,' replied Trafford in a quiet voice, and Miss Grantham somehow did not like to question him further, so asked if any one had seen Mr Bolton. Maggie had. He had had some severe twinges, but was rather amiable, and she was going to read to him after luncheon.

A heavy cloud settled on Miss Grantham's brow, and she scarcely spoke again during the repast. Immediately it was over she rose and retired to her study, where Maggie followed her.

'Don't stay with me,' said the heiress abruptly. 'I would not speak if you did. Go to Mr Bolton; I shall be in a better temper when you come back.'

Maggie obeyed; and as she went out met Trafford at the door.

'Is Miss Grantham visible?' he asked.

I think so,' replied Maggie, and passed on

'It is quite fine now, Margaret. Tor and Longmore have gone to smoke; come out and have a walk with me.'

'I do not feel inclined to accommodate myself to your whims.'

'Do come. It is my last day here, so don't be unfriendly. Come, I want to talk to you.'

'If I take cold, on your head be it,' said Miss Grantham, rising; and a few minutes later, from the window of Mr Bolton's sitting-room, Maggie saw the pair (and exceedingly well matched they looked) walk away down one of the carriage-drives that crossed the park.

The evening passed as usual, but Maggie observed that Miss Grantham was peculiarly quiet and pensive; and when they retired made no advance to a private talk. Trafford, in saying good night, looked into her eyes earnestly for an instant, adding, 'And good-bye. I leave in the morning.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE next morning all the world seemed absorbed in Mr Trafford's departure which Maggie viewed from a safe window, half hidden by a friendly curtain. She had thanked God he was going, and now he was gone! Well, it was wonderful how much seemed to have gone with him. She felt disappointed, too, that Miss Grantham had not sought her for sympathy and comfort. It seemed that the burst of warmth and affection which had so delighted her, was to bear no further fruits. However Maggie determined to arm herself with the twin giants—faith and patience.

Luncheon was hardly over when the Southam carriage drove up, and to the surprise of Miss Grantham, 'Lady Brockhurst and Madame de Beaumanoir' were announced to be in the drawing-room. 'Be sure you come in,' said Miss Grantham to Maggie. 'I am so glad there is a chance for you to see her.' They were almost the first words she had spoken since she sat down, and Maggie was quite rejoiced to be addressed even in a semi-confidential manner. To the spoilt heiress it was nearly impossible to disguise her feel

ings, or assume that which she did not feel, and every one could discern that she was depressed and ill at ease.

This condition of things being attributed by the remaining gentlemen to the departure of 'that fellow Trafford,' they were proportionably discontented, so a general gloom infected the company, and every one was relieved by the arrival of visitors.

When Maggie reached the drawing-room, Miss Grantham was speaking to Madame de Beaumanoir, who stood near the fire, and Lady Brockhurst had nestled herself into a low chair close to Lady Dormer.

As Maggie entered, Miss Grantham half turned, and said, 'Miss Grey. Lady Brockhurst. Madame de Beaumanoir.'

Both ladies looked at her, and Maggie felt abashed under their scrutiny; there was, she fancied, something peculiar in the glance which the French lady flashed upon her, as though she knew and hated her; it was but instantaneous, and she was bland as ever.

'Madame de Beaumanoir was going to leave us to-day, but the weather was so fine she said she would like to drive over and bid you good-bye,' said Lady Brockhurst to Miss Grantham.

'How very kind! Then you do not leave just yet?'

'To-morrow, *sans faute*. I am obliged to return to Paris. This charming visit has kept me too long. I hope, dear Mademoiselle, to see you soon in our gay city.' Then turning to Maggie, with what she thought perfect sweetness and good-breeding, 'Have you been in Paris, Mademoiselle?'

'Yes; and greatly enjoyed my stay there.'

'Without doubt. I suppose you were with Mademoiselle de Grantham,' continued the Marquise, looking steadfastly at her.

Maggie could not help blushing under her gaze, while Miss Grantham answered, 'No. Miss Grey and I had not found each other out then.'

'I imagined Mademoiselle had been your companion for long; all things are so feudal and long established in your magnificent *château*.'

'Miss Grey could not be a *very* old institution anywhere,' said Lord Torchester, good-humouredly in English (the conversation had hitherto been carried on in French).

'Come, Torchester; you are more accomplished than I thought! cried his cousin. 'I did not imagine that you understood French.'

'I understand more than you think,' said the Earl significantly.

'Really! What a dangerous character,' she replied, laughing.

'But yes,' said Madame de Beaumanoir, 'he *was* dangerous and alarming in Paris. I heard of him;' and she shook her head playfully at the young nobleman.

'Only Geoff Trafford's scandal,' he returned. 'It is well for Geoff I do not tell tales of him,' and he nodded confidentially to Madame de Beaumanoir.

'*Fi donc!* It is not fit for Mademoiselle to hear such *badinage*. And Monsieur Traffore—he has parted, is it not so?'

'Yes. Gone to London *en route*. Where, Torchester?'

'Tartary—Siberia—Kamschatka. Heaven knows!'

'You really do not think so,' said Miss Grantham, opening her blue eyes.

'You English gentlemen are so very enterprising; that is to say, restless. Dear Mademoiselle, you must choose a *parti* among my countrymen!'

'They are so much more domestic and stay-at-home,' said Lord Torchester gravely.

'*N'importe* where husbands go, so long as they wander.'

'I'm sure Frenchmen are better-tempered and easier to live with from all I hear,' cried Miss Grantham vexed, she scarce knew why, with the Earl.

'English ladies, at least, do my countrymen justice,' said Madame, a smile curving her crimson lip. 'And you, too, *ma petite demoiselle*, what say you? You too appreciate French gentlemen.'

'I was very fond of one French gentleman,' said Maggie simply, and without thought.

There was a good-humoured laugh. 'We little thought of extracting such a confession,' said Miss Grantham.

'I presume you do not mean Monsieur de Bragance,' said the Earl.

'No, indeed!' returned Maggie, laughing gaily at her own *naïveté*. 'It was poor Monsieur du Val. I think you have seen him,' she added, addressing Lord Torchester.

'The old music-master? Yes; I remember you were great chums.'

'Then you are old acquaintances,' said Lady Brockhurst, feeling herself considerably bored at being thus left out of the talk and reminiscences, and feeling slightly antagonistic to Miss Grantham's last whim, the little brown-haired secretary.

'Oh, yes; quite old acquaintances, as modern lives run. How long is it since we met in Paris, Miss Grey?—eight or nine months?

'You mentioned De Bragance,' said Madame de Beaumanoir. 'Is he not that famous chevalier d'industrie who married an Englishwoman of fortune the other day?'

'Exactly,' returned the Earl; 'and that unfortunate woman was a great friend of Miss Grey.'

'Indeed,' said the Marquise, with another inexplicable look at Maggie. Then as Lady Brockhurst was expounding her plans and proposed movements to Lady Dormer and Miss Grantham, she rose and went to the window. Maggie sitting quiet and unemployed, took in the whole scene: Miss Grantham, in her long black dress, listening all polite attention to Lady Brockhurst; the airy grace and luxurious winter garb, all feathers and fur, of that lady; Mr Longmore, in proper and accurate morning dress, on the hearth-rug; and Madame de Beaumanoir standing tall, stately, though pliant, by the window, all brown velvet and sealskin, with maize-coloured ostrich tips in her bonnet, and topaz earrings; the Earl's big, almost burly figure beside her; the beautifully-decorated room, the flowers, the numerous costly trifles; the slight sense of oppression she always experienced when in the grander apartments and among strangers—all remained stamped on her memory, as certain scenes do get themselves stamped when they either immediately precede or succeed great and sudden changes in our internal history.

'Ah!' exclaimed Madame la Marquise. 'What lovely little ponies—quite fit for Cinderella! Yours, I suppose, dear Mademoiselle?'

'Yes. They go remarkably well.'

'Ah!' cried Madame again, 'I have just one little caprice. If I might be indulged without interfering with the arrangements of Mademoiselle.'

'I shall be charmed to gratify you,' said Miss Grantham, politely.

'Then, if it will not be too *gênant*, drive me back to Southam with those delightful ponies. It will be a little transit full of pleasure! Delicious!'

'My dear Marquise, Miss Grantham drives so fast you will be frightened to death,' said the Viscountess.

'*Du tout! du tout!* I trust myself to her utterly.'

'I shall be most happy,' replied Miss Grantham.

'Then I shall retire myself and my humdrum britschka,' said Lady Brockhurst, rising to take leave.

There were many smiling adieux, and Madame de Beaumanoir

was quite enchanting in her playful exultation at having the lady of Grantham for a charioteer; and when Miss Grantham went to dress, Maggie stole away with a sense of relief, and left the irresistible Marquise to perform to the gentlemen and—Lady Dormer.

But while Madame de Beaumanoir was fascinating her auditors, her busy brain was plotting how to improve the ensuing hour or two to the best advantage. The first glance at Maggie's well-remembered face revealed to her much that she had considered incomprehensible in Trafford's conduct. The eagerness with which he had sought her society on all occasions, flattering though it was, could not quite deceive the instinct of a *grande passion* which Madame la Marquise imagined she entertained for Trafford. She had always recognised him as a sort of obstacle to her frequent intercourse with Miss Grantham, and decided in her own mind that he wanted to marry the heiress, and with the curious crotchetty disposition—*de tirer le diable par la queue*—so peculiar to Englishmen, he did not care to bring his future wife and his *chère amie* in contact. Not that it would have distressed Madame, for she very soon decided that Trafford did not feel a shade of warm feeling towards his intended. *Tant mieux;* that sort of thing was troublesome and irrational in marriage; still, however agreeable and attentive he was to herself, the terrible doubt always fretted her that somehow he did not love her; *ergo*, he must love some one else. She had never forgotten her rencontre with him in the Bois de Boulogne; and though her suspicions had been allayed, they had frequently recurred, and helped to keep alive the *engouement* for that icy Englishman at which she herself marvelled; in fact, so strong was the 'caprice,' that on hearing from her friend and 'pardner,' Lady Brockhurst, that Trafford was a guest in the close neighbourhood of Southam, she resolved to indulge her curiosity respecting life in an English country-house, and so accompanied the Viscountess. Now the whole mystery was solved. That traitor showed her devotion only to blind and mislead her. Here was the reason that he always in some indefinable manner interfered with her visits to Grantham; and, *bon Dieu!* to think of *his* having scruples, when no doubt he quartered this '*pensionnaire, par exemple*,' as confidential friend with his *fiancée!* 'But hold,' thought Madame, as all this rushed through her brain, 'I have revenge in my hand, and he shall not know whence it comes. Now I must win over the fair "mees." She dislikes me; she thinks her cousin loves me.

I must win her, or she will not believe me; and I must not say too much: these young Englishwomen are at once *trop bien instruites et vraiement ingénues*. I must simply sow the seed which will produce an all-pervading growth; destroy his plans and fix her true character on that pale, slender, unformed child who has so riveted his distorted fancy. I am glad my suspicions brought me here to-day.'

By the time Madame de Beaumanoir had arrived at this sage and meritorious decision, which we need not say was achieved in rapid flashes of thought, not hammered out in all the dreary length of words as it is upon this page, Miss Grantham reappeared in out-door dress. '*En avant*,' said the Marquise, rising. 'Adieu, dear Lady Dormer. *Au revoir*, mi Lor', for you will be in Paris soon; pray persuade Monsieur Longtemps to come with you. I shall be your cicerone myself; you English gentlemen do not get a true idea of Paris when you live among your own countrymen and Americans at Meurice's.'

Miss Grantham whipped up her ponies; the tiny groom scrambled in behind at the risk of his neck, and they were away.

'This is delightful,' cried Madame de Beaumanoir, with such apparent pleasure that Miss Grantham felt mollified towards her. 'How well you drive; I always laughed at Monsieur de Trafford when he said you did all things well, even to conducting horses—but he is right.'

'He tells a different story to me,' said the heiress; but the keen eyes that watched her noticed a pleased expression steal over her face.

'Bah! you ought to know your countrymen better than I do; and with a man so proud and so situated, he will say all that he does *not* think.'

'I will leave her to digest that,' thought the Frenchwoman. 'Pray shall I derange you too much to ask if you will kindly drive to the station? I must telegraph to Mivart's to say I have missed the train.'

'I thought you stayed on purpose,' said Miss Grantham, rather bluntly.

'You take everything *au pied de la lettre* in your charming sincerity,' replied Madame de Beaumanoir, laughing. 'To say truth, I had appointed to receive two or three French friends, who being Legitimists find it convenient, you comprehend, to live in London, and I do not like them to think I merely remained for a caprice.'

'Very well. I shall go on to the station.' But Miss Grantham did not quite like it, and would have liked it still less had she known that the sole object of the telegram was to keep Trafford quiet.

'You have known Geoffrey Trafford for a long time,' said Miss Grantham, after waiting in vain for Madame de Beaumanoir to renew the fascinating subject.

'Yes, yes; since—nearly eight years. He is much changed; more thoughtful, melancholy—but I soon understood him.'

'I do not think him melancholy. I do not fancy he has any reason to be melancholy.'

'You do not think so? Ah! what can a *demoiselle* like you know? He is but a *cadette*, though noble, and feels his hopes are too highly placed.'

'No, no, Madame de Beaumanoir,' said Miss Grantham, smiling and blushing, while she touched up the near pony, which was not pulling fair; 'you are quite mistaken. I too understand my cousin, for I have known him all my life. He is grave sometimes, but I do not think he has any unhappy longing for what he does not possess.'

'It is just that. He has often described the details of your early days with a fond persistency. Yes, my dear young friend, he could not conceal his secret from me. I do not say he confided to me in so many words that he adores you; but he does—I know it. I have not seen so much of that great electric current which sweeps us all with it at one time or another, to doubt his feelings. Poor fellow! he loves you, and believes in your indifference.'

'I doubt that,' thought the heiress in the depth of her honest and impetuous heart. 'I cannot believe it,' she exclaimed, blushing vividly and beginning to think that Madame de Beaumanoir might possibly be only a disinterested friend to Geoffrey; that she might have judged her harshly. It was hard to turn a deaf ear to the voice that charmed so wisely.

'I was much surprised to find him here,' continued Madame, 'for I know his erratic habits; and I think he was pleased to find a sincere and not injudicious friend to talk to with a sort of semi-confidence; but partly from observation, partly from what I knew of him in Paris, I should say he is kept back from striving to win your affection by two causes.'

They had now reached the railway station, and Miss Grantham, burning with curiosity, was obliged to descend and assist her

charming friend in transmitting what she knew to be a falsehood. This accomplished, they started again, the ponies' heads being directed towards Southam. Madame de Beaumanoir felt she could not spare time to wait for Miss Grantham's questions, and so resumed.

'The two causes to which I alluded ought, I believe, for both your sakes, to be made known to you. They are, first, jealousy; and, secondly, an unhappy entanglement.'

Miss Grantham was beginning to feel very uncomfortable. She could not repress her curiosity, and yet it seemed frightfully treacherous to listen. 'Pray do not tell me Geoff Trafford's secrets,' she exclaimed; 'I am not anxious to know anything of them.'

'Nay, I am only going to tell the result of my own observations; I would not for worlds betray anything. Your kinsman is jealous of Milor Torchester, who is evidently a *prétendant;* but it is not this that is so serious. Let me ask you a question or two. The young person who is your secretary. She knew Lord Torchester, and also Mr Trafford, in Paris?'

'Yes, both,' said Miss Grantham, feeling a sort of dizzy sensation.

'And was doubtless placed in your establishment by Mr Trafford.'

'By Geoffrey?' in a tone of great astonishment. 'No, certainly not. She answered an advertisement. She and Geoffrey were thoroughly surprised on meeting—*she* was, at any rate. What can you mean, Madame de Beaumanoir?'

'That I imagine, from the degree of intimacy which existed between them in Paris, there is some entanglement, some *liaison*. Nay, I mean nothing wrong,' cried Madame de Beaumanoir, a little startled at the fire that flashed from Miss Grantham's soft blue eyes. 'A sentimentality, such as young women are sometimes betrayed into innocently.'

'Geoffrey betray any one! Geoffrey place any doubtful person near me!' cried Miss Grantham, with unconcealed scorn. 'Madame de Beaumanoir, you totally misunderstand your subject. What reason have you for such suspicion? I have a right to inquire into what affects the character of my household.'

Madame la Marquise was rather taken aback by this mode of receiving her communication. She had expected agonies of jealousy, tears, exclamations; but not this tone.

'You exaggerate to yourself, my dear! I merely wish to clear

away these barriers of trifles which interfere with the happiness of a friend so esteemed as Mr Trafford.'

'Nevertheless, Madame de Beaumanoir, I should like to know on what you found your opinion that a *liaison* existed between my cousin, Mr Trafford, and my secretary, Miss Grey?'

'Simply because he avoided more suitable society to drive about with her in the summer evenings,' said the Marquise viciously.

'Impossible. I cannot believe it.'

'Nor would I, had I not myself seen them in the Bois de Boulogne,' returned Madame, demurely.

'Seen them?' echoed Miss Grantham, dismayed.

'Yes; I do not speak unadvisedly. I have seen them. And this I believe to have been Mr Trafford's reason for always raising some difficulty about my going to see you.'

As she spoke, the memory of Maggie's indisposition, which prevented her appearing when Lady Brockhurst and her party dined at Grantham, crossed the heiress's mind with agonising doubts; and, again, Maggie's unhesitating readiness to meet the Marquise that very morning came to her with a gleam of hope, and a flash of detestation for the accomplished operator who was applying the torture so successfully.

'I cannot dispute, Madame, what you say you have seen,' said Miss Grantham with dignity; 'but I shall make it a point to inquire into what you assert.'

'Then, my dear, you will do very wrong. There is nothing to justify heroics. I have merely warned you to be on your guard. Disembarrass yourself of the young *pensionnaire* as soon as you can, and meantime keep a watch upon her; place her somewhere out of Monsieur's reach, or marry her to some one. I have spoken out of pure friendship to you and your cousin; also in perfect reliance on your honour and loyalty not to betray me as your informant.'

'But if I cannot name you, how am I to discover anything or do anything?'

'Mademoiselle, I have said enough to enable you to trace all things. I do not a moment suppose that Monsieur's momentary *engouement* for your young friend has not passed away. His *grande passion* is for yourself. Nevertheless their meeting is not without danger. For myself, I have risked something in speaking at all. I demand your assurance that my name be not mentioned.'

Madame de Beaumanoir spoke with so much dignity, such an

assumption of injured merit, that before Miss Grantham could collect her thoughts she had promised profound secrecy.

'And so our charming drive is over,' said Madame de Beau manoir, as they passed through the gates of Southam. 'Ah, Mademoiselle, I shall often think of you, and trust to see you in dear Paris. Do not trouble yourself about the trifles that ruffle the surface of your life at present. Be firm; be true to yourself, and they will vanish. Adieu, dear and beautiful friend.'

And as Madame la Marquise stood on the upper step of the entrance to Southam House, with an expression of tender benevolence on her speaking countenance, she blew a kiss, to the vexed, stupified Miss Grantham with airy and ineffable grace.

The white ponies had been driven at top speed from the Castleford Station to Southam, and their mistress allowed them to proceed home more leisurely. Never in the course of her prosperous existence had the heiress of Grantham felt so restless, so irritated, so injured. Against Trafford she felt but small indignation; but that little Miss Grey should have received her confidence respecting him, have had the audacity to suggest some attachment or engagement, have had the duplicity to look appealingly in her face, and ask her to love her, when——And here instinctive recognition came to Miss Grantham's aid. She could not—she did not—believe Maggie Grey could be guilty of such duplicity. Why not trust her rather than that *rusée* French woman? 'But how am I to find out? How am I to ask?' thought the unhappy girl. 'I have promised that horrid woman not to mention her name, and I must not break my word. I will see what I can get out of Torchester. He is an honest fellow. I am sure he would not palter with the truth for any consideration. I wish Geoff Trafford was at the world's end before he came back to make me miserable.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE week which followed the departure of Trafford and Madame de Beaumanoir was equally unpleasant to Miss Grantham and to

her secretary. At times Maggie's looks and tones and unconscious words, all sorts of trifles, were proofs 'strong as Holy Writ' to Miss Grantham that she and Trafford 'understood' each other, and were *lié* in some mysterious way. For a *mésalliance* she thought Trafford was too proud; the possibility of anything worse did not occur to her. Again, the strong instinctive sympathy between them would assert itself, and for an hour or two she would think there was not a truer-hearted, purer-minded, sweeter girl in the world than Maggie Grey, and that if Madame de Beaumanoir's story was true, no one was to blame but Geoffrey.

Unhappily, although she flattered herself that her manner was perfectly even and unaltered, Maggie understood her too well not to perceive every variation of feeling, and grew quite nervous and miserable in consequence. In vain she strove to think that Miss Grantham's depression and uncertainty of temper was unconnected with herself. A keen innate conviction pressed in upon her that, for some unknown cause, from the moment she had, as she thought, secured her patroness's affectionate friendship, the amount of favouritism she had previously enjoyed was withdrawn, for Maggie counted the change from the Sunday Miss Grantham had taken a *tête-à-tête* walk with Mr Trafford. It was strange, too, that she had never mentioned the magic name since that sudden outbreak of confidence.

Maggie exhausted herself in conjectures; she lay awake all night nearly, and at last determined not to be thus lost in a Slough of Despond for want of an effort to get on *terra firma*, and that on the first opportunity she would ask Miss Grantham what it was that intervened between them.

Mr Bolton was now so much better, that he announced his resolution to return to his oar on the following Monday. Maggie was surprised how much she regretted this; for, besides his having softened and unbent to her in a marvellous degree, he was a legitimate source of occupation, without which she would feel herself quite a supernumerary.

The remains of the Christmas party were to disperse on Saturday, except Mr Bolton. Grantham Longmore, being under orders from his mother not to leave Lord Torchester a 'fair field,' had waited to follow his lordship's lead; they were, therefore, to start together for Mount Trafford, where a large shooting party was to assemble the next week.

'I suppose you will be quite pleased, Torchester, to get away

from this slow place,' said Miss Grantham, the evening before his departure. Lady Dormer's whist was made up, and the cousins found themselves *tête-à-tête*. Miss Grantham was pretending to sketch a design for a bracket, but restless, and longing to quarrel with some one.

'No, I shall not,' said the Earl, bluntly, laying down a newspaper and coming to her side. 'Why should I?'

'Because you will have good sport and congenial society at Mount Trafford, and you had neither here. Geoff Trafford says the Grantham preserves are not preserved.'

'They might be better; but the hunting has been first-rate, and as to the congenial society, Margaret, you know tolerably well the only fault is, I did not get enough of it.'

'Whose?' said Miss Grantham, opening her eyes with an expression of wondering simplicity. 'Lady Brockhurst's, or Madame de Beaumanoir's?'

'You can be the most provoking, puzzling, ridiculous girl that ever lived. Madame de Beaumanoir! As if I would look at her, or she at me, while Geoff was in the way!'

'Come, do not be scandalous. You know they were friends since before the Flood!' Miss Grantham spoke lightly, though the Earl's words sent a thrill of pain through her nerves.

'Of course I do. He nearly lived at the *Hôtel Pontigny* when we were in Paris last spring.'

'I thought he was constantly with that Madame de—something—Mrs Berry—what do you call her? or, rather, Miss Grey, who must have been the most companionable of the two.'

Though Miss Grantham spoke sweetly and gaily, and Torchester was not a man of rapid perceptions, he espied danger in the tendency of his cousin's remark. He looked towards the subject of this possible jealousy, who was at the moment explaining a trick to Mr Longmore, with the sweet, bright, intelligent smile that had once charmed him so much, and feeling how unjust any suspicion of undue intimacy was both to Trafford (of whose visits he knew little or nothing), and the gentle girl to whom such an imputation might be most injurious, he hastened to reply:

'Mrs Berry—Miss Grey—oh, no! He only went there with me. I was the *habitué*. I think it bored Geoffrey to go there. We *all* liked Miss Grey, you know; she was so quiet, and gentle, and unlike the rest.'

'And what on earth took *you* there, Tor?' asked Miss Grantham, greatly relieved by the Earl's tone.

'De Bragance took me there.'

'Do you mean to say that you associated with that dreadful man, who behaved so infamously to Miss Grey's friend?'

'He was a very well-bred fellow, and exceedingly good-looking; *you* would have been delighted with him.'

'I am sure I should not. And what did you do at these soirées?'

'Oh, nothing particular—played cards sometimes.'

'And I have no doubt you lost your money. I hope you are not a gambler, Tor?' This random shot told.

'I am not, indeed; and you don't care a straw what I am.'

'I do, you ungrateful boy! I look on you as a brother.'

'Well, I do not look on you as a sister.'

'Yes, you do—you always did. And so you, not Geoff, were Miss Grey's ally in Paris?'

'Yes,' said the Earl, dimly conscious of spiting Trafford, 'he was always philosophising with the Marquise, till he got tired of the whole concern.'

'So you left the Berry party in Paris?'

'Yes. I think Geoffrey mentioned having gone to one of the receptions after I left.'

Miss Grantham dared not question more; she just threw out a leader:

'I suppose Geoffrey was very pleased to meet Madame de Beaumanoir again?'

'He never said so, but it looked like it. Now, Margaret, what are you going to do?—I mean before you come up to town. Have you quite made up your mind not to go to Llanelwy?'

'I have not thought about it; but I must answer Lady Hillshire's letter to-morrow. I think I shall go. Who is to be there?'

'I am, which ought to be enough. St Lawrence and Lady Brockhurst, and Sir Hugh Erskine, and Geoffrey Trafford. He said he would go, and some more people I forget. Do come; you will be moped to death here.'

'Fretting for you, eh? Well, I dare say I shall; and after all, we are closely related—it is not like going to a strange house. I think I *will* go, Tor.'

'Do. The more you know the Marquis the more you'll like him. He is a capital fellow, and a first-rate shot.'

'What a recommendation! But he is so ugly. Are you going to have him at Mount Trafford?'

'Yes; only till the twenty-seventh or twenty-eighth, when the Llanelwy party assemble.'

Grantham seemed very huge and empty when they were all gone. Mr Bolton bade Maggie quite a tender farewell, somewhat to Miss Grantham's amusement:

'You have really helped me over what might otherwise have been very uncomfortable hours,' he said to her. 'When you have written that novel you have on hand, and Miss Grantham has no more work for you, pray come to me. I begin to think I must want a secretary.'

'I shall keep you to your word,' returned Maggie, smiling, and thinking she might do worse than be companion to the surly, gouty old man.

'Come, come, no tampering with my adherents!' cried Miss Grantham, more genially than she had spoken for some time. 'At present Miss Grey is mine, and she had better be off with an old love before she is on with a new.'

After exchanging very cordial adieux with his hostess and a few private parting words, Mr Bolton was packed in furs and railway rugs, and sped away to town.

'Come into the study with me,' said Miss Grantham to Maggie, who, feeling that the watched-for opportunity was come, could scarcely nerve herself to the task of approaching so difficult a subject as Miss Grantham's variability of manner, and nervously alive to every look and tone, let the minutes slip by, not knowing how to begin. After opening and looking at a pile of circulars, petitions, applications, &c., Miss Grantham said rather abruptly, 'I am going into Wales, to the Marchioness of Hillshire's, for a week or ten days, about the twenty-ninth, and Aunt Dormer wants to go to town to see the dentist or the doctor. Would you like to go with her, and see your friends? I do not think I shall return here; it is so doleful and grim, so'——

'Pray do not say I am to leave you,' interrupted Maggie, unable to control her fears.

'No, I do not,' said Miss Grantham, smiling, and looking sharply at her companion. 'You would not like then to go?'

'Certainly not, unless I thought you really did not want me, or

that I had displeased you; and I have feared often lately that I had. You are changed to me.'

'I do not think I am.'

'Yes, dear Miss Grantham. There is not a tone of your voice or a glance of your eye that does not say so—at times. Do tell me why? I know I do not deserve your displeasure.'

'My dear Miss Grey, I do not intend to show any difference but people are not always in the same spirits, or'——

The heiress paused, struck with the pained sad expression that came over Maggie's face as she felt that her earnest effort after a right understanding was being brushed aside, and a sense of the singular loneliness and dependence of her little secretary brought a sudden wave of kindliness over her heart.

'There then,' she exclaimed, 'if you will have it, I am a little vexed with you for a bit of imprudence, so unlike your usual modest quiet with its dash of pride.'

'What can I have done?' asked Maggie, bewildered.

'You must have known it did not look well to drive about Paris alone with Mr Trafford,' continued Miss Grantham.

'But I did not,' cried Maggie.

'Not!' echoed Miss Grantham. 'Not once?'

'Yes, once,' replied Maggie, turning pale at the idea of this sacred secret having been revealed to the lady of Grantham, and then seeing her way clearly, went on: 'I will tell you all about it. Mrs Berry was away at Fontainebleau, and I had gone out, intending to spend the evening with some friends of hers. They were not at home, and when I returned I found the servant had taken advantage of my absence to go out too; had locked the rooms and taken the keys. I happened to meet Mr Trafford, and told him my position, for I was quite distressed. He very kindly proposed to drive me as far as the Lake, in the Bois de Boulogne. I did not hesitate to go with him. A drive was a rare treat for me, and when I returned the servant had come back.'

'And you never went anywhere else with him?'

'Never—never,' and Maggie looked straight into Miss Grantham's eyes.

'I am sure *you* thought no harm,' said she kindly; 'but Mr Trafford ought to have known better.'

'Surely there was nothing wrong in so very simple a proceeding?

'No—nothing wrong, but imprudent; and it was rather curious

Geoffrey taking that trouble. Then, you see, a man of his position giving up his engagements, for of course he had engagements—you say it was evening?—to drive with you, had rather a queer look. He ought to have known better.'

'I quite understand the great difference between us,' said Maggie, the colour coming back to her cheeks with a crimson flush as the iron entered deep into her soul, while Miss Grantham calmly pointed out that any attention from Trafford—Trafford who understood her as no one else did, little as he spoke to her, must be looked upon as doubtful, if not degrading. 'I quite understand the difference, and it was because Mr Trafford always spoke to me like a kindly friend, and never deviated into any other tone, that I went with him so unhesitatingly.'

'Then,' cried Miss Grantham, her faith in Maggie returning, 'he never made love to you?'

'He never presumed to do so,' cried Maggie, the native fire and pride latent in her soft nature lighting up her eyes; 'and, indeed,' returning to her ordinary manner, 'I am sure he never was inclined.'

'You are a proud puss,' returned the other; 'to talk of Geoffrey Trafford presuming to make love to you!'

'Yes, Miss Grantham, I have my own pride—which you can afford to leave me; for the same superiority, which makes it almost impossible for a man of his rank to think of a girl like me as a wife, entitles me to resent the faintest approach to love-making—though I need not reject kindly civility, frankly offered.'

'Well said! You are what Torchester would call a brick! You have quite removed my faint disapprobation. I see you can be trusted.' ('But,' thought the heiress, 'I do *not* quite understand Master Geoff.') 'Now,' she continued aloud, 'put all this out of your head. I am quite glad you forced me to explain myself. I could not bear to feel a shade of discomfort towards you. Tell me, did you ever see Madame de Beaumanoir in Paris?'

'Yes, once, at a great ball to which Mrs Berry took me. Mr Trafford was with her, and I asked Lord Torchester who she was—but he did not observe her—so I was not sure who she was, until I saw her here last week.'

Miss Grantham mused a while in silence, she could not quite understand it; but, at all events, she would put full faith in Maggie Grey, and as for Madame de Beaumanoir, she was a mischief-maker *pur et simple*—who only wanted to make bad blood between

her and Geoffrey, because she was in love with him herself—odious, unprincipled creature!

'Then, I suppose, after rescuing Torchester from Mrs Berry's gambling friends, Mr Trafford stayed on in Paris to enjoy the society of Madame la Marquise?'

'Perhaps so. He certainly did not leave with Lord Torchester.'

'Well, enough of all this—give me my portfolio. While you answer those letters, I will try and sketch Madame de Beaumanoir, and leave some work for you when I go to Llanelwy; by-the-by, I was going to say, when we digressed into this explanation, that if you like to go up to town with Lady Dormer, and see your friends, you may as well do so, for I think I shall go somewhere till after Easter; it would be intolerable to stay here.'

So it was settled after a little more discussion, that Maggie should accompany Lady Dormer to town, and, if convenient, pay a visit to her uncle's family. While in the mean time, Miss Grantham should decide where she would pass the weeks which intervened before Easter, and arrangements should be made for all to meet after she had paid her visit to the Hillshires. Thus, confidence and amity being restored, the days passed over happily enough, and Miss Grantham, with Maggie's assistance, devised sundry toilettes suited to mourning, and yet striking in effect.

'You know,' said Miss Grantham, as Maggie arranged the music the same evening, for a diligent practice, 'I want to look passable, for Sir Hugh Erskine is to be at Llanelwy.'

'Is he? do you know him? Who is he?'

'Oh! he is everything—irresistible—the greatest judge of beauty, the most eccentric, fastidious man in England, and awfully fast!

'What a formidable person!'

'Yes. I should rather like to reject such a paladin.'

'Perhaps he might persuade you to accept him; and I should think he would make a very undesirable husband.'

'My dear! you are a Mentor and secretary all in one! No, not the smallest chance of my saying yes, to any one who will ask me.'

When Maggie was alone, and at the convenient period, when the candle is out, and conscience, rousing herself for a hunt, uncarts some bogie of 'ten tynes,' to chase through all the dells and glades of memory and self-accusation, the review of her conversation with Miss Grantham was anything but satisfactory.

First, although she had stated nothing but the truth, it was any-

thing but the whole truth. If Miss Grantham thought that to drive alone with Mr Trafford was an outrage on propriety, what would she say to his visits? What would she say to that delightful tête-à-tête dinner which Maggie could not bring herself to regret? But the more she reflected on her patroness's remarks, the more puzzled she felt by Trafford's conduct. As Miss Grantham said, his taking even so much trouble on her account was curious, and to give up an engagement for her—as it was probable he had—was quite extraordinary. It was very easy to say, 'Put it all out of your head,' but such a subject would not be banished, and the great mystery of how Miss Grantham came to know of her reprehensible expedition, *this* was the most painful bit of it all.

After profound cogitations, she could only conclude that in the course of the confidential walk and talk which she had enjoyed with Mr Trafford on the day before he left, he must have inadvertently mentioned it. That he did so intentionally, she never for a moment believed. That he should have so far forgotten his interest in herself to do so, was bitter enough; and with the proneness to self-torture which is so common in sensitive minds, she recalled the delicate but unmistakable warning he had given her, to avoid letting even Rosalie know where she had been on that memorable evening, and now it was of so little importance, that he could mention it casually; for he must have done so either to Miss Grantham or Madame de Beaumanoir, and this latter would have been even a more unpardonable offence in her eyes! Whatever he might once have thought of her, she could not now posssess the least bit of sacredness in his eyes; but the exact means by which Miss Grantham had arrived at that disturbing morsel of information must remain a mystery. She could never approach the subject again. Pride, self-respect, regard to her kind employer, all imperatively demanded that she should 'put it out of her head,' and she determined to do so. Trafford could never be quite the same Trafford to her again, now that the secret between them was no longer a secret.

The magnitude of Miss Grantham's—or rather her maid's and milliner's—preparations for a visit of ten days somewhat surprised our inexperienced heroine; and she said as much to her indulgent patroness.

'My dear girl, you would not have me appear every day in the same dress? And then, you know, it is my *début* as "Miss Grantham," in anything like general society. Besides, I have to complete

the conquest of little Alf St Lawrence and utterly subjugate Sir Hugh Erskine, were it only to show Geoff Trafford that other men have eyes, if he has not. I wonder has he gone to Paris with Madame de Beaumanoir! I have heard nothing from him; nor has Torchester, who writes that Geoff has not yet turned up at Mount Trafford.'

'Oh! I do not suppose he could have gone to Paris.'

'Heaven knows; I shall never calculate on Geoff's proceedings again,' returned Miss Grantham, carelessly; but her words had a painful significance to Maggie, who rejoiced that she was going among new scenes and new people, and thus the current of her thoughts would doubtless be diverted into different channels.

Maggie never knew the luxury of travelling *en grande dame* until she accompanied Lady Dormer to London. The civility of station masters, the delicate attentions of guards, extended to the neighbourhood of the great metropolis. And then the comfort of stepping at once into a cosy brougham, and driving straight away to one's dressing-room and dinner, instead of shivering and struggling for luggage amid 'the crushing crowd, doomed to inflict or bear,' which penance may be safely left to the vicarious offices of intelligent servants. Wealth has its merits, certes!

The great house in P—— Square was but very partially unhollanded for the reception of Lady Dormer and the secretary. It looked rather gruesome, Maggie thought, as they drove up. However, the smallest of the three drawing-rooms had been uncovered for their occupation, and here a bright fire and a table laid for dinner looked cheerful and habitable.

'I am so tired, my dear,' said Lady Dormer, to whom exertion of any kind was overwhelming; 'though I should have been much worse if you had not been with me.' Maggie's native kindness and bright alacrity made her a great favourite with indolent elderly people. 'Well, Johnson,' to the under-butler, who was in attendance, 'have you all the luggage right, and did you get my fur cloak?'

'Yes, my lady. I was just in time to get it, before the carriages were moved off.'

'Any letters?'

'Yes, my lady,' presenting a salver laden with cards and notes.

'Just put them here on the writing-table, and pray let us have dinner. Miss Grey and I are quite exhausted.'

'Take my arm to your room, Lady Dormer.'

'Thank you, my dear. I think there is a letter here for you; we will see, after dinner.'

Miss Grey was quite willing to wait till after dinner for her letter or letters. She had written to her cousin to let him know she was to be in town for a week, and also to Mrs Berry (as she still wished to be called) in case she might be there too; these were her only correspondents.

'Dear me! that is quite fortunate,' exclaimed Lady Dormer, after dinner, looking up from the note she was reading. 'Mr Flummery can see me to-morrow at twelve. That is the advantage of coming before the rush of the season; a month or two later, and I should have had to wait weeks. Don't you think it would be a good plan, Miss Grey, to have your teeth looked at also, now that Flummery is not so busy?'

'I don't think they want any looking at, thank you,' said Maggie, smiling.

'It is wiser to have them attended to before they want it.'

'I have a note here from my cousin, Mr Grey. He proposes coming to see me to-morrow, between ten and eleven, and I wish you would be so good as to tell Johnson to show him into some other room; it will disturb you if he comes in here.'

'Oh! the young man who came down to Grantham? No, my dear, you will not disturb me. I shall not leave my room until I go to Flummery, at twelve or a quarter before. You must be content to breakfast alone to-morrow. I don't think there is another room open; by-the-by, I should be so much obliged, Miss Grey, if you would write to Lady Torchester for me; here is her note. Say I am so exhausted by the journey, I really could not write; that I am fortunate in having an appointment with Flummery to-morrow, and when I know if he wants to see me again, I will fix a day to go and stay with her; and my kind love.'

'Very well, Lady Dormer.'

'Just a few lines will do,' said her ladyship, and settled herself for a refreshing nap before tea. Maggie set forth her writing materials, and had hardly commenced, when Lady Dormer opened her eyes, and said sleepily, 'Will you be so good as to mention that the Rector's Persian cat has four kittens, if she would like one?'

'Yes, Lady Dormer.'

'Two of them are white, one grey and one black—or two black and one white, I am really not sure—but perhaps I might remember

by the time I see her,' and Lady Dormer was wrapped in sleep before the last words were quite complete.

Maggie wrote on, smiling at the oddity of thus writing to the mother of the man who had done his best to induce her to marry him. 'I am very fortunate, however,' she thought, 'to find so many to be kind and pleasant with me; but, after all, it is a lonely lot, and at best only a tolerable desolation. I wish I could love Cousin John—there seems to lie my only chance of a home! but I cannot, and that's the end of it. I wish he was not so imperious and provoking.'

The sedate and correct Johnson was removing Miss Grey's breakfast the next morning, when Cousin John arrived.

'Well, Maggie,' he cried, taking both her hands, 'this is luck! I never thought I should see you so soon again—let's have a look at you,' taking her coolly by the shoulder, and turning her round to the window. 'Why, you don't look half the girl you were a month ago. You're pale and down-looking. What have you been doing with yourself, little Mag?' There was genuine hearty kindness in his tone, and Maggie's eyes and voice responded to it instantly.

'Oh! nothing, dear cousin. I have been well and happy, and I am very glad to see you.' John seized that favourable moment for an abrupt kiss. 'No, you ain't, you little humbug; you think more of the fine filigree gentlemen you saw at Grantham.'

'Do not begin to be disagreeable the moment we meet.'

'All right. And now what are you going to do in town?'

'Nothing.' She proceeded to explain Miss Grantham's plans, and her consequent freedom.

'Lord!' cried John, 'isn't she content with that fine place of hers that she must go into some one else's house?'

'It does seem strange.'

'And this is Miss Grantham's own too,' said John, looking round.

'Yes, all her own.'

'Who is she going to marry? I wonder she hasn't picked up a husband before now.'

'What a pity you have not an opportunity of trying *your* chance,' said Maggie, laughing.

'Now don't you be jealous,' said John, tenderly.

'Well, John,' cried Maggie, still laughing, 'I do think you the most conceited man that ever lived. I am sure you believe you have only to ask Miss Grantham and she would accept you.'

'Come now, that's a little too strong; but she might do worse.'

'It is quite enviable,' added Maggie, reflectively. 'Tell me, do you think it would be convenient to my uncle and Mrs Grey if I were to pay them a visit for a few days? I am free just now, and I do not know when I may be so again.'

'Convenient! Yes, of course it is—it must be,' cried John, delighted. 'You are a little trump, Mag, after all, to stick to the old folks. Now look here. I tell you I did feel a little uncomfortable about the tall thin chap that sticks on so well to his horse. I didn't like the way he questioned you, and looked at me, the day we met him in the Park. I can't tell why,' continued John, puzzled by the strong unaccountable instinct which pressed upon him a dim feeling of danger; 'but I did not like him. I suppose you were as thick as thieves down there?' a jerk of the thumb in the supposed direction of Grantham.

Maggie, though infinitely provoked with John, and still more with herself for blushing so causelessly, could not help laughing at her cousin's phraseology, and for pure mischief said, 'I spent nearly every evening very agreeably in his society.'

'The deuce you did! Now, Mag, remember, I warned you'——

'Don't be ridiculous,' interrupted Maggie indignantly. 'I need no warning. If you could only see a little of life at Grantham, you would understand the impossibility of Mr Trafford showing me anything but the mere civility due to a lady introduced by his hostess. Do not offend me by such miserable suspicions, or I shall send you away.'

'By Jove, Mag, you have learned to do the grand lady in fine style' Never mind, you have the right spirit. Now about going to see the governor. You write, and I'll write. We will go down on Saturday. I can get a bed at the inn, but I must come up on Monday or Tuesday and I'll bring you back. By the way, Fred Banks is down there. I have not had time to write to you since;' and John proceeded to recount the capital arrangement he had made for a partnership between the young medical student and his father, &c., &c., to all which Maggie did 'seriously incline,' truly interested in the welfare of her kind, oppressed uncle. 'And, John,' she asked hesitatingly, 'is Mrs Grey more cheerful and pleasant with uncle than she used to be?'

'She does not snub him quite so much, if that's what you mean. I have made her feel he has a son at his back as won't stand that. Wasn't she a tartar to you and me? We were always in the same

boat, eh, Mag? Still it was hard to a business-like woman, as she is, to see her money melting away, and a niece of her husband's quartered on her.'

'No doubt, no doubt, I must have been a sad burden,' with a swelling heart.

'What nonsense,' he returned, 'neither the governor nor I thought so.'

Maggie was silent. She wanted John to go. She felt half afraid of a prolonged interview leading to some painful explanation; and, rough and disagreeable as John was, she could not bear the idea of causing him annoyance. He must ever be her best and oldest friend of bygone times. Nothing could efface the debt of gratitude she owed him.

'If you are going to the city, John, perhaps you will walk with me to Oxford Street. I have some shopping to do.'

'Of course I will. I ought to have gone before, but'—with an indescribable wink—'it's not so easy to get away.'

'Well, do not let me keep you now if you are pressed for time.'

'Go, put on your bonnet,' was John's reply.

'Oh, I have worked you such a smart pair of slippers. I will bring them down.'

'Well, you are a little brick, and no mistake. You did not quite forget me all those agreeable evenings.'

'I should be very ungrateful if I ever forgot you, dear cousin.'

'Look here, Mag, I am going out sooner than I intended. I have settled everything very satisfactorily, and I think I'll be off in April, early in April.'

'Indeed,' said Maggie looking down, as she thought, whatever John might be, she had no other friend in the world like him. Oh! if she could only love him. 'I suppose I ought to be glad of your success, and I am; but I shall be very sorry when you are gone.'

'Shall you though, little Mag?' cried John with a flash of pleasure beaming out in his eyes and over his face, red hair and all. 'Never mind, I am not gone yet, and we'll see.' He was determined not to speak till what he considered the right time; but he thought it a suitable moment for an embrace, which Maggie deftly eluded.

'There, John, you know I hate to be hugged.'

'F[illegible] I ought, by this time,' growled John, much disappointed.

When Maggie joined him with her bonnet on, not even the peace-offering she bore, a pair of delicately-worked slippers, brown and yellow leaves on a crimson ground, sufficed to chase the cloud from his brow. He looked on moodily while she put away her little workbox, and rang to let the grave Johnson know she was going out.

'Shall you be in to dinner, 'ma?' asked that official.

'Yes, certainly.

'Lady Dormer ordered it at six.'

'Very well, Johnson.'

'I suppose that fine friend of yours, Mr Trafford, will dine here,' grumbled John, as the servant left the room.

'No, I should think not,' returned Maggie. 'I do not think he is in London.'

'Yes, he is though. I went to the Reform Club yesterday to see one of our big colonists on business, and I saw him standing on the steps of the "Travellers" talking to a couple of swells like himself.'

'Perhaps he is here. I know nothing about him.'

When Maggie had coaxed Cousin John into a better temper and bid him good-bye, promising to start for Market Ditton on Saturday by the 12·30 train if she heard favourably from Mrs Grey, she proceeded to perform her shopping, and then, feeling curiously fearful of returning to P—— Square, she took a long solitary walk along Hyde Park and round Kensington Gardens, the old familiar locality where in the bitter bygone days she had so often walked, in attendance on Jemima and Bell. How well she remembered every inch of ground, and the hopeless sadness and depression with which she used to grope around her, in thought, for some way of escape, and found none! Then she was the bond-slave of that fearful tyrant, her aunt, to whose minute and degrading despotism she could not look back without a shudder; now she was the companion, nay, the friend, of the heiress of Grantham; raised infinitely above her original lowly state, and not likely again to sink into it, and that too through no exertion or special merit of her own. How thankful and happy she ought to be! And was she not? Yes, of course she was; if she still felt a painful unsatisfied craving in her heart, it was only a reprehensible discontent, that she must resist and subdue; she must have faith in the future, and strive to have her sources of happiness in her own heart and mind:—grand resolutions if they could be fulfilled, but wholesome,

as an astringent, even in an attempt at fulfilment. So, strengthened by her self-communing, Maggie made her way back to P—— Square, and found that Lady Dormer had only just returned.

'Mr Trafford called shortly after you went out, 'm,' said Johnson, as Maggie passed through the hall. 'He asked how long you and her ladyship would be in town. I told him you had just gone out with Mr Grey.'

Maggie told herself it was well she had not seen him. She could not forget the sense of betrayal she had felt; and then he was evidently a source of jealousy to Miss Grantham, to whose friendship she looked for whatever brightness her future might possess. All the weakness and folly which eddied round this idea must be swept away and utterly renounced.

Lady Dormer was highly pleased with her interview; the adroit Flummery only wanted to see her to-morrow, so she could go down to dear Lady Torchester on Saturday.

'Mr Trafford was here to-day. I thought he was with Lord Torchester. Pray write to Miss Grantham to-morrow and say Johnson shall go down to Ryde on Saturday about a house.'

The evening passed rather nervously to Maggie, though she managed to discover an old 'Quarterly' with several interesting articles in it; still she could not help a sort of dread, not all fear, lest Mr Trafford might come in to ask about Miss Grantham; but he did not.

The next morning brought a long list of divers and sundry articles which Maggie was to procure, and which two days' stay at Llanelwy proved to be indispensable; they were to be despatched that evening without fail. 'The party,' Miss Grantham wrote, 'was most amusing, not too large, and there was a talk of theatricals. Sir Hugh Erskine was quite an orthodox hero—handsome, dark, taciturn, and did the "inscrutable" remarkably well. Nevertheless, he unbends a little to me. Torchester is expected on Saturday, and Mr Trafford at the same time, if he has not gone to Paris. Lady B. does not come till next week. I miss you in many ways. Pray amuse yourself if you can. You were certainly *trise*. You must turn your cousin to some account in London; no doubt he is at your service,' &c.

Maggie was very glad to have something to do, so set about her commissions with great good-will, and after an arduous day's work managed to despatch a tolerable-sized box and a long letter in time for the evening mail. Maggie quite enjoyed writing to her

admired friend. She told her of her own small plans, assured her that she would be in London again on Tuesday at furthest to await her commands, gave all and sundry the messages delivered to her by Lady Dormer 'between sleeping and waking,' the changing of her plate at dinner, and the trying on of sundry caps and bonnets, for even Lady Dormer had her vanities. Finally she put a concluding paragraph: 'Mr Trafford is not gone to Paris. I saw his card here yesterday, and I think Lady Dormer expects to meet him at the "Beeches" on Saturday.'

That evening there was a telegram from the heiress, 'Do not let Johnson go to Ryde, or take any house, till you hear from me.'

And so, in total uncertainty as to future plans, Maggie started next day to meet Cousin John, having had a very cordial invitation from Uncle Grey himself.

She was much relieved, and the least bit disappointed, that Mr Trafford had not appeared, for she always hoped he would in some way clear himself from her suspicions of treachery—the last crime of which she could have thought him guilty.

CHAPTER XXX.

It was a still grey morning when Maggie reached the station. Cousin John was in waiting to receive her as she drove up, and presented a gay and gorgeous appearance.

'You are just in time. I began to quake for you. No more luggage? Come along, then. I will get your ticket.'

And she was quickly whirled into a second-class carriage. It was too crowded to permit of much conversation; but John contrived, among the clatter of the train and a noisy political discussion between a stout farmer-looking man and a better-class mechanic, to say, 'What do you think? They have got Polly Banks down there,' in somewhat a triumphal tone.

'Indeed!' said Maggie. 'I suppose she is a friend of your sister's?'

Perhaps. It's the missus that's so sweet upon her.

Very little more passed between them during their three hours' journey through a not very interesting country, and Maggie felt both dull and tired when they reached their destination, for John had joined the political discussion and managed to turn it on colonial affairs, on which he held forth with an air of conviction and authority, of pertinacity and strength of lungs, that overpowered his listeners, and made Maggie's head ache.

Ditton Market was a prosperous little place. The establishment to which Mr Grey had succeeded had been very well known for miles round, and Fred Banks had managed through 'a friend connected with the press,' *i. e. The Ditton Market Herald and the Farmer's Chronicle*, to spread a report that the incoming tenant was a London pharmaceutist of high attainments and metropolitan fame, obliged to seek a more salubrious dwelling. The change proved very beneficial in every respect, and poor Mr Grey seemed quite revived by the improvement of his prospects and in his wife's manners.

'We are a little behind time,' said Cousin John, handing Maggie into the *Royal Hotel* omnibus which met the trains. 'Four o'clock! It will be five before we get a mouthful. I am so sharp set, Mag, I could eat you—and a nice tender bit you'd be, Mag.'

'Oh! I can be very tough if I like,' she returned, good-humouredly.

'By George! it was a great idea having Polly Banks down! Now you will see she is not to be sneezed at, Miss Maggie.'

'Did I ever say anything on the subject?'

'Now, then'—to the conductor—'how far round are you going before you put us down?'

'All right, Sir. We allus goes to the *Royal* first.'

At last they arrived. A large old but modernised house, imposing front, lots of big jars, and a huge gold pestle and mortar over the door, to which Bell and Jemima had strongly objected, but in vain. John would stand no nonsense; the country people had always been used to it, he said, and ten to one they would think the new man would poison them if he took it down.

The house, a roomy rambling edifice, occupied a corner at the further end of the High Street from the railway station, and so had the advantage of a private entrance through an old-fashioned garden, and on that side looked as prosperous and cared for as whitewash and green paint could make it.

'This is quite charming,' cried Maggie, as, descending from the 'bus,' John rang the bell, while he eyed the place critically with the air of one who had a vested right in the concern. 'What a delightful change from Beverly Street! I am so glad to think my dear uncle has such a home.'

'And it don't pay so bad,' said John, complacently. 'I think they must be all asleep,' and he gave a second powerful pull to the bell; whereupon the smart green door was flung violently wide open, and forth rushed Bell and Jemima in bright red tartan dresses, followed by a tall abundant-looking young lady in blue French merino, with piles of black ringlets fastened back to a thick roll of hair, dominated by a scarlet tuft of ribbon, of which smaller bows adorned her throat and wrists, and would no doubt have encircled her slight waist (which, with the exuberance above and below, suggested unpleasant ideas of breaking in two) had waistbands been in fashion.

'My goodness! how late you are!' cried Bell.

'We had almost given you up,' said Jemima.

'Better late than never,' added the lovely Polly.

'Why, Maggie, I'm so glad to see you, old girl!'

'It's good for sore eyes. Pa is so pleased.'

'This is Fred Banks' sister. We coaxed her down to help keep John in order; she can give it to him in style when he is *too* bumptious.'

'Law, Jimmy! I don't know what Miss Grey will think of me!'

Such were a few of the torrent of words which almost stunned Maggie; she was too innately wise with the wisdom of good feeling to shrink from homeliness; but the rampant vulgarity, the noisy self-satisfaction of her cousins, utterly overwhelmed her. She was, however, pleased that they seemed glad to see her, and so allowed herself to be swept indoors, where Aunt Grey, who honoured the country with a white lace cap and green ribbons, awaited her in a large, low, comfortable parlour, cheerfully lighted by three windows. A huge beam ran across the ceiling, and a nice red fire glowed in a tolerably modern grate. 'Well, Maggie, it's a treat to see you,' said Mrs Grey, quite graciously, 'and highly condescending to come from such grandeur to our 'umble 'ome. Where's your pa, girls? Tell him Maggie's come. Here, John, let me help you off with your coat, and draw up to the fire; it's a cold afternoon.'

Here Uncle Grey made his appearance in tolerably well-blacked

boots and a generally 'brisked-up' air, which delighted Maggie's quick eye even while she hugged him heartily. 'Dear, dear uncle, I am so glad to see you! And you are looking so well.'

'Why, my little girl, and so are you, and smart. I see a sort of change in you. Eh, don't you, my dear?'

'Of course I do,' said Mrs Grey.

'Only the difference between new clothes and old,' whispered Maggie, pleasantly.

'Come,' cried John from the fire, 'I thought you did not like to be hugged, and there you are cuddling the governor to no end. How goes it governor?' cried John, patronisingly, and rising to shake hands with his father. 'And now, girls, get us something to eat, for we are famished. I'll answer for partner and self.'

'Law, Mr John!' cried Miss Banks, with fascinating liveliness, 'have you and your cousin entered into partnership?'

'Articles ain't signed yet,' returned John, facetiously.

Bell and Jemima accompanied Maggie to perform the ceremony known as 'taking her things off.' The room to which they took her, though far from luxurious, was cleaner and better than the bed-rooms of Beverly Street, and here Bell and Jemima poured forth a duo of intelligence:

'Ditton is such a nice jolly sort of place, and do you know Fred Banks is here, and pa's partner?—he is grown so steady—never goes out of an evening.'

'I suppose he finds the company at home too pleasant to leave,' said Maggie, smiling; whereupon Jemima tossed her head and Bell laughed.

'Don't you chaff before John,' said Jemima. 'He is horrid particular. And do you know, ma thinks Polly is quite smitten with John, and would be a nice match for him; but Bell says it's no good, he is bespoke.' A knowing look at Maggie pointed the remark.

A very plentiful repast, in the shape of a 'meaty tea, was set forth when Maggie descended; whereat the whole party assembled. Maggie slipped into her old place by her uncle, and under pretence of not putting brother and sister together, Mrs Grey placed the junior partner between Maggie and 'Jim,' as she was familiarly called, and John between Miss Banks and Bell.

John never appeared, in Maggie's estimation, to less advantage than when, 'among his own people and in his father's house,' he was monarch of all he surveyed. On the present occasion he was

unusually joyous and rampant. Miss Banks's evident admiration filled the easily-inflated balloon of his self-esteem even nigh to bursting, and he regarded the whole company, except Fred Banks, as puppets, to be benevolently moved by his hands.

'So glad to see you, my dear,' said Uncle Grey quietly and privately to Maggie.

'Not more than I am to see you,' in the same tone, and pressing his hand.

'Come, Mag; let the governor alone, and see if you can manage to get through the afternoon meal without golden sherry and—what did you call the sweet stuff? I can tell you Mag has been living on the fat of the land'—and John proceeded to give a glowing account of his visit to Grantham. While he talked, Maggie indulged in a steady look at Miss Banks, whose attention was absorbed in the speaker.

She was of the 'fine animal' order; with very white teeth, very red cheeks, and very black eyes; dreadfully afflicted with a consciousness of her own charms, and possessed of a pair of large red serviceable hands; but Maggie was pleased to observe her expression was far from forbidding or unpleasant; for, thought she, 'I cannot help fancying she will be Cousin John's wife.' While Miss Banks very deliberately eyed 'little Maggie,' of whom she had heard so much, from head to foot, and decided that she was a poor, insignificant creature—almost plain—and that it was not probable a fine young man like John Grey would be content with such a little chit when there were better articles to be had. Of course he would be a great catch for *her*, penniless as she was.

John's description of Grantham roused a large amount of interest and curiosity.

'What was Miss Grantham like?'

'A stunner, *I* can tell you,' replied John. 'As tall as Miss Polly here; as straight as an arrow; and as fair as—oh! as anything; her hands looked as white, as soft, as a bit of down—and all sparkling over with rings. I never saw such a heap. She was uncommon pleasant, and quite anxious for information about South Africa; but just as I was about to tell her a lot, Mag, who I could see had been fidgety, or jealous, or something, said we were trespassing on her time, and jumped up—though I am sure the young lady would rather I should have stayed. Eh, Mag?'

'Perhaps so,' said Maggie, prudently.

'Law, Maggie! and what did you do all day?' asked Bell.

'Oh! I wrote letters and copied papers and practised, and walked and drove about.'

'A nice easy life, I'm sure,' said Mrs Grey.

'And did you use to be all by yourself in the evenings?'

'Not she,' put in John. 'She used to spend them very agreeably with a thin fellow—a "snuff the moon" high and mighty swell!'

'What! by their own selves?' asked Miss Banks, horrified.

'No, no,' said Maggie, laughing good-humouredly; 'I used to go into the drawing-room every evening to play whist and Miss Grantham's accompaniments, and met the gentleman Cousin John means among the rest of the company.'

'And who were the company?'

Maggie gave a *catalogue raisonnée* of the people staying at Grantham.

'My! The Earl of Torchester!' exclaimed Jemima.

'He is quite young, isn't he?' asked Fred Banks. 'I remember his coming of age. He is very rich; quite a big swell.'

'And did the Earl ever speak to you?' asked Miss Banks.

'Oh, yes; I knew him before, in Paris. I used to think him like John.'

'Goodness, Maggie! Why did you never name him before?'

'Why, Mag, you are as close as wax.'

'I suppose you knew Mr What-d'ye-call-him in Paris, too?'

'Wherever did Mrs Berry pick up such people?' chorussed the ladies of the family and Cousin John.

'I scarcely know; but Mr Trafford and Lord Torchester used to be at her receptions—parties, I mean.'

'And what is the Earl like?'

'He is a plain, shy, good-natured young man, rather like John.'

'It does not sound very like,' said Miss Banks. 'I can't discover that Mr John Grey is shy.'

'Or plain,' added the subject of her remarks.

'I did not say so, Sir.'

'But you implied it. I'll be hanged if you didn't.'

A noisy encounter of wits ensued; after which Maggie had another cross-examination as to the habits of the aristocracy, which she went through satisfactorily under a running fire of 'Upon my word, you have fallen on your feet.'

'What a lucky little thing you have been, Maggie!'

'Sixty pounds a year for just doing nothing.'

'That is the worst of it. I should like to have more to do,' said Maggie.

'It is rather like being a servant, isn't it?' asked Miss Banks, with an air of simply asking for information.

'It is,' replied Maggie, calmly. 'I only wish I had more definite service to perform.'

John said nothing, but he looked a little exultingly at the fair Polly. He rose a few minutes after. 'Come, governor,' said he, 'I want a smoke and a little quiet talk with you and Banks.' And the three gentlemen retired. Nor were the ladies dull in their absence. Mrs Grey expatiated on the relative cost of housekeeping in town and country, while Maggie made herself amusing and instructive by an accurate description of the fashions at Grantham, of the dresses ordered by Miss Grantham for her visit to Llanelwy —of her jewels—of the Viscountess Brockhurst—and, above all, of the brilliant Marquise de Beaumanoir. Finally, when the gentlemen rejoined them, they had a round game, at which the spirits of the party rose to a high pitch.

Time would fail to tell how Miss Banks declared John cheated, and tried to snatch his cards to prove herself right, and was in the wildest exultation and the lowest depths of despair; how John accepted all this curiously expressed tribute to his powers of captivation with a rollicking air of superiority; how Maggie felt utterly extinguished in the general hubbub (for Mr Banks and Jemima were almost as noisy); how Cousin John at intervals would cry, 'Hey, Mag, what are you and the governor about?' just to keep her spirits from drooping—for he was determined, to quote his own thoughts, 'to give her such a dose of Polly Banks as would put the thin horseman and all the other filigree chaps at Grantham out of her head.'

The last act was a substantial supper, a liberal allowance of Market Ditton ale, for which it was considered famous, some hot brandy-and-water, a spoonful or two in a wine-glass to each lady; and the party, well pleased with themselves and each other, broke up.

The succeeding Sunday was bright and dry. Mr Grey, Fred Banks, and the ladies, went duly and properly to church; but John luxuriated in his slippers till dinner-time. 'You see,' he explained, with his usual candour, 'I haven't a character to keep or to lose in Market Ditton; if I had I'd be as regular at church as the parson

After church came the early dinner. A walk succeeded, when all paired off, for Bell elected to remain at home, and Maggie appropriated her uncle's arm. It was a rural though flat country round Market Ditton, nevertheless pleasant, with neat cottages, orchards, and hedge-rows.

Maggie thoroughly enjoyed her talk with her uncle; their former sympathy and confidence flowed as freely into the old channels as though it had never been interrupted, and Uncle Grey imparted to his affectionate listener, with unusual animation, that he had been asked to deliver a popular lecture on chemistry at the local literary and scientific institution; and as John approved the scheme he was going to do so. Then Uncle Grey proceeded to describe the subject or subjects, and his intended treatment of the same, and Maggie continued deeply interested.

John looked a little sulky when they returned. He had positively neglected Maggie for Miss Banks, and that provoking little monkey was so wrapped up in the governor's rigmaroles that she did not even seem to see it. However, the tone in which she replied to Bell's question, 'Have you had a pleasant walk?' by a sincere 'Oh, delightful! you can't think how pleasant,' struck John as being too exaggerated. He therefore consoled himself with the conviction that the whole was a piece of acting; but that in reality Mag was breaking her heart. The result of which was a reversal of his conduct, and from tea-time onwards he was most demonstrative to his cousin, and negligent of his father's fair guest. Miss Banks was alternately moody and boisterous, and Maggie was thoroughly uncomfortable.

'I say, Mag,' cried John, as they were bidding good-night, 'what train shall we go up by to-morrow?'

'I am not going up to-morrow, John.'

'Come, nonsense. You know it's all settled. We were to go back together.'

'I do not know, indeed. I wrote to Miss Grantham to say I should stay here till Tuesday, and Lady Dormer will not be back. I shall be all alone in that great house if I return to-morrow.'

'Don't let that trouble you,' cried John. 'I'll come and keep you company.

'And then I do not know when I shall be able to come and see my uncle and aunt again; so I have quite made up my mind, John, to stay till Tuesday.'

John said no more; but a very angry, sullen cloud gathered on

his brow, and an expression of ill-repressed wrath contracted his jaws.

'Law, Mr John,' cried Miss Banks; 'you look as if you could eat us all without a grain of salt.' Her loud but cheery voice turned the current of his thoughts.

'You're going up to town to-morrow, aren't you?' he asked.

'I *did* intend going——'

'They'll be expecting you at home,' said her brother.

'Come along then. I'll take you up. We'll take the 1.45. It's not express; but we'll be in time for tea; and your ma will give me a cup of tea, eh?'

'All right! you shall have the tea and "summut" with it,' returned Miss Banks, frankly.

'That's something like,' cried John; 'no shilly-shally nonsense. One would think you were my cousin, not Miss Margaret Grey.'

'Oh! then I have not had the advantage of having been at Grantham.'

'Good-night, John,' said Maggie, out of patience with his unreasonableness. Why should he expect her to be his bond-slave? And heartily did she that night thank 'the Providence that shapes our ends' she had escaped the thraldom of the Grey family. She was far from ungrateful to them; but to her sojourn in the tents of Kedar, which may be modernised into Beverly Street and Aunt Grey's jurisdiction, she looked back with sincere unmitigated horror.

John did not 'come right,' as Bell termed it, up to the moment the *Royal* bus called to pick up the travellers next day. He was over-demonstrative—affectionately towards Miss Banks, wrathfully towards Maggie. She was unmoved, but regretted that he was so self-willed and unreasonable.

'I shall be at P—— Square on Wednesday and Thursday, John,' she said, determined not to quarrel. 'After that I am not sure.'

'Oh, ain't you? Looks very like asking me to call and make up, don't it?'—to the company generally.

'Rather,' said Jemima.

'Something,' added Bell.

'Be sure you call before the missus comes back,' put in Miss Banks.

'I do not think we have anything to make up,' said Maggie; and John departed without so much as asking for a kiss.

When Maggie reached P—— Square the next afternoon, she felt not a little satisfied to have left Aunt Grey and the girls behind her. If it was sad and dull to be alone, it was at least not irritating. She could think her own thoughts, uninterrupted by petty questions and querulous commentaries, and the perpetual display of low motives and narrow tempers. Not that the class amid which her lot had been of late cast was morally much elevated above the one she had left; but the springs of daily life were well oiled, and good breeding was at least 'an outward and visible sign,' even though the 'inward and spiritual grace' had evaporated.

'Letters for you, Miss,' said Mr Johnson, entering the drawing-room—he had not thought it necessary to open the door for the
ary—'and this card'—a foreign-looking piece of pasteboard,
inscription: 'La Comtesse de Bragance,' and under-
Berry.'
nform you.
so sorry I did not see her!' exclaimed Maggie aloud.
d she would call again.'
nson. There is a letter from Miss Grantham,
ctions for you.' She glanced over the pages.
t once to Eastnor, and engage a house facing
n the Royal Esplanade. Miss Grantham says
required. She wishes it to be ready for her
ry, as she will probably leave Llanelwy about
Grantham says she will require stabling for
carriage horses, and a couple of riding horses,
Wheeler on this subject.'
Now I thought I knew every place in Eng-
rwise, but Eastnor sounds quite strange. Do
Miss?'
it is quite a new place on the Sussex coast,
into fashion. You must of course start
lady'—pointing to the card—'would be
it. If she calls this evening I will send
near what she says.'
you, Miss; for I feel all at sea.'

Maggie then proceeded to read Miss Grantham's letter more deliberately. It was full, though hasty. Maggie had executed all the commissions admirably. Nothing omitted. Llanelwy continued to be most amusing. Geoffrey Trafford had arrived, but was going on to Ireland the day but one after, to see the Giant's Causeway in bad weather. 'Imagine what a provoking contra-

[illegible] creature! He asked me a good deal about Madame de Beaumanoir's visit, and said he thought you had gone out with the South African man the day he called. Pray don't go all the way with him, dear Miss Grey.'

'Sir Hugh Erskine is still staying on. We are getting up a part of "Lucrezia Borgia." I am *prima donna*, but unfortunately Sir Hugh's voice is baritone: so they are hunting up their set for a lover for me. Johnson must get a house at Eastnor. Lady Brockhurst and her brother, and Mrs Stamer, and heaps of people they know, are going there till Easter. We are to live in the most primitive manner, and it will be charming. Pray go down there soon and have it all nice: you have so much taste.'

The second letter was from Lady Dormer. She was so comfortable, and dear Lady Torchester was so kind, that she thought she would just stay where she was till Miss Grantham had decided about a house. Would Miss Grey write and let her know when anything was decided!

So Mr Trafford had followed his beautiful kinswoman. Very natural. Just what might have been anticipated; and, moreover, it implied breaking with that horrid Madame de Beaumanoir, whereat Maggie rejoiced. 'Well, I suppose Miss Grantham will not be long Miss Grantham, *et après le déluge*. I hope she will not tease him too much with that Sir Hugh Erskine.'

'Mrs Berry,' said Johnson, breaking the thread of her thoughts. Maggie rose up quickly.

Mrs Berry, though pale and looking a little worn, was much the same as ever. She was well and suitably dressed too.

'Oh, how glad I am to see you, dear Mrs Berry!' cried Maggie, embracing her.

'Ah yes, I thought you would be; but times is sadly changed,' said the erst blooming frisky widow. 'My dear, I am a broken-hearted woman. How nice you are looking, and in such luck—how different from poor me! Of all the treacherous, designing, captivating ruffians that Count was the worst! To think of his squandering my money in five months, and to put another woman in my place. It was enough to turn my hair grey in a single night, like poor Lord Byron's,' and Mrs Berry plunged into a long rambling narrative of the cruel treatment she had received and the frightful reverse of fortune she had sustained. This was agreeably diversified by tea and buttered toast, sent up by the thoughtful Mr Johnson. Maggie was even more pleased to see

Mrs Berry than she expected. Her familiar voice and peculiar modes of phraseology transported her listener back to Paris—enchanted Paris of last spring—before she knew in what the enchantment consisted—before she had learned that she must dash away the cup of joy from her lips, and ever hereafter shut the eye and ear of memory to that with which it was most haunted.

'And, dear Mrs Berry, what are you doing now?' asked Maggie, as she sat beside her former patroness, and held her hand in hers.

'That's what I was coming to,' said Mrs Berry. 'I declare, Maggie, it quite warms my heart to talk to you, and I can see you are downright glad to have me with you. Ah, Maggie, if I had taken your advice!' and she dropped a few tears. 'Well, as I was saying, I have agreed to rent a furnished house from a friend at Eastnor, and let my rooms in the season; and if I find I can make it pay I'll buy up the concern; my trustees will advance me the money, or indeed buy the house for me, so that the Count can't touch it; and I want you to get some of the grandees you are amongst to give me a turn.'

'I did mention your plan to Lord Torchester and Miss Grantham.'

'Lord Torchester!' cried Mrs Berry, interrupting her with great amazement. 'You don't mean to say *he* has turned up again? Now don't you go to refuse him a second time.'

'He will not give me an opportunity. I think he has forgotten he ever asked me. He is in love with Miss Grantham now,' and Maggie proceeded to explain the relationship between them.

'Well, well!' said Mrs Berry, 'the changeableness and inconstancy of those men is just awful! My dear, you would have been man and wife by this if it hadn't been for Trafford—a deep, designing, proud fellow as ever I came across, but, I must say, pleasant to talk to.'

'How large is your house, Mrs Berry? Miss Grantham wants one at Eastnor just now, and a number of fashionable people are going down next month. Would you mind telling Johnson about the place? He is going down to-morrow, and knows nothing whatever of it.

Johnson was summoned, and received many useful hints. Mrs Berry's own house was too small; for as Johnson observed majestically, 'we will want a dining-room and a drawing-room and a morning-room, at the least, and a private sitting-room, bed-room, and dressing-room for Miss Grantham herself; then,' with a com-

prehensive wave of the hand towards Maggie, 'there's my lady and Miss Grey—and Mademoiselle, and myself, and three or four more.'

'Law, my good man,' cried Mrs Berry, to Maggie's horror, 'you needn't talk to me. I know all about what you must want; it's not so long since I had a *salon*, and a *salle à manger*, and dressing-rooms, and all the rest of it, myself. No; my place isn't big enough; but No. 15, Royal Esplanade, is a fine corner house, and mine is No. 3, Esplanade Villas, quite handy. I could let a few upper bedrooms to some of you, if you require them. You go in for No. 15; there *are* parties after it, but mention my name, and you'll get it for twelve guineas a week, and the cook in.'

An expression of bland but infinite contempt stole over Mr Johnson's impassive features. A few more particulars, and stating that he was much obliged, Mr Johnson retired.

'What a nice polite man! Quite the gentleman. Ah, my dear! what a come down for me to be talking about lodgings to such people!—and now—where were you staying when I called on Sunday?'

'Oh, with Uncle Grey.'

'What! and that aunt of yours, who used to wipe her shoes on you, in a manner of speaking?'

'Even so,' said Maggie, laughing; and proceeded to describe the revival of the family fortunes since the return of the eldest son, frequently interrupted by Mrs Berry's exclamations of 'Well, I'm sure!' and 'I never!'

'Now, my dear, I tell you what. I believe the young man is in love with you, and I believe he was at the bottom of your refusing that nice, elegant young nobleman. Well, well, there's no accounting for taste—but——'

Here the 'respectable young woman,' who acted as general servant under the antiquated female in charge of the mansion, entered, and said,

'A gentleman for you, Miss.'

'Law! my dear, who can it be?' cried Mrs Berry. Her question was answered by the almost immediate entrance of Cousin John.

'I did not expect to see you to-night,' said Maggie, rising and holding out her hand. 'Mrs Berry, my cousin, Mr John Grey.'

'Very pleased to see you, I am sure, Sir. I have often heard of you, but I never thought we should meet.'

'Thank ye,' said John, still surly. 'Yes, Miss Maggie, I thought I would just come and look after you a bit; there's no knowing

what this young lady would be up to if she was left to herself,' he added to Mrs Berry.

'Ah! you needn't talk to me! Were we not like sisters for nearly two years! and a sweeter, steadier girl—oh! you needn't shake your head, Margaret; I'll say it before your face and behind your back—never walked, and I don't care who the other is.'

'She's an obstinate little devil, anyhow,' said John, relaxing. The fact was, John had travelled up to town the day before and supped at Mrs Banks's, in so great a fury with Maggie, that he was rather too demonstrative to Miss Polly, and now began to think he had better make all safe with his cousin, before he trusted himself again in the society of her rival.

'Now, John,' said Maggie, pleasantly, 'you have not the smallest reason to find fault with me.'

'Come,' said Mrs Berry, with an air of kindly chiding, 'you two has had a quarrel—that's plain to see; and you are right down miserable, the pair of you. Why are you such fools as not to kiss and make it up? Ah! if you had gone through the troubles I have, you wouldn't be so ready to throw away happiness.'

'I am sure I ain't,' cried John; 'but Mag is aggravating.'

'Don't be a silly,' retorted Mrs Berry. 'Haven't I heard of Cousin John, till—not knowing you—I was sick of the subject? And when poor Lord Torchester begged and prayed to be let come to my elegant parties in the Champs Elysées there, didn't she say, "Do ask him, Mrs Berry, he is so like Cousin John?" And then I never could make out why she refused him. No matter.'

'Refused him!—refused the Earl of Torchester?' almost shouted John, in utter astonishment.

'Pray, Mrs Berry, do not talk so! You do not remember things rightly; you have had so much trouble since. Pray say no more,' urged Maggie earnestly.

'Well, Maggie, you may say what you like; the Earl did ask you and you refused—I'll take my Bible oath of it.'

John gave a low whistle, and stood up on the hearth-rug.

'That was a chance, Mag! And pray, mum,' to Mrs Berry, 'as you seem to know so much about this young woman's proceedings, did she refuse a tall thin fellow, called Trafford, as well?

Maggie laughed out loud, and Mrs Berry replied unhesitatingly, 'Lord bless you, no. Trafford was no friend of your cousin's; he was a proud cool hand, as might go in for a countess in her own right. He and Maggie could never agree.'

'Hum,' said Cousin John, and fell into deep reflection.

'Mrs Berry, and John,' said Maggie with much earnestness, 'I do beg of you, you will never speak of this again. It was a piece of boyish folly on the part of Lord Torchester, which he has forgotten, and I particularly wish it not to be known to Miss Grantham.'

'I'm sure it shan't cross my lips again,' said Mrs Berry with a knowing smile, as though conscious of having used her knowledge judiciously. She then plunged into a history of her own wrongs. John was silent, and then, to Maggie's great relief, offered to see Mrs Berry home. She was only in town for a little business, she said, and was to return to Eastnor the next day, where she hoped to see Maggie shortly.

'I'm coming to talk to you to-morrow,' remarked John to his cousin.

'Then pray come early, for I do not want any one in the evening, except indeed Mrs Berry.'

The next morning brought a letter and a list of commissions from Lady Dormer, with a few in addition to be executed for Lady Torchester. Maggie was well pleased to be out and occupied, but she felt she dared not stir till John had paid his promised visit, which, for some undefined reason, she partly dreaded. She hoped he would not be late, and while she hoped he came.

'How that woman talks!' was his first remark, having exchanged greetings. 'But she is not a bad sort of a female—and deuced sharp. I wonder how that French fellow managed to take her in.'

'Her shrewdness is very narrow. Poor Mrs Berry! I am quite fond of her,' returned Maggie, sighing. A long pause, during which John stood looking in deep thought at the fire. Finally, thrusting in with his foot an obtruding angle of coal, he turned to his companion and spoke abruptly:

'I say, Mag, why did you refuse this big swell?'

'Oh! because he did not—could not—have known his own mind. There, I wish you would not talk about it.'

'Yes, but I want to know. Come now, Mag, tell the truth; was it any hankering after me?'

'Not in the least, John'—with uncompromising steadiness.

'What? You didn't care a straw about me then?'

'No, I was always fond of you, but I was not in love with you,

if that is what you mean,' said Maggie, colouring deeply and praying for deliverance from this dreadful moment.

'Then do you mean to say you don't care about me now?—that you don't intend to marry me?'

'Yes, John,' she replied faintly.

'Do you mean to tell me you didn't see *I* intended to marry you? I went out that I might marry you, and I came home to marry you. You must have known it right well.'

'Yes, John,' the tears almost brimming over, 'I have been afraid you did think of me in this way, and indeed—indeed, I always tried to show you how I really felt, but you *would* not understand it. I am so grieved.'

'But look here, Mag,' cried John, still not understanding it, and sitting down beside her; 'ain't you the silliest little goose in London to hesitate? Now, without vanity, where will you get such another offer? You have scarcely a friend in the world. It is all very well just now, but Miss Grantham may marry any day, and where will *you* be? Then, I can offer you a good home. I am a rising man; I feel it—I know it! I might have nearly any girl I liked. Many a one would say I ought to look higher; but I love you, little Mag; I always did. 'Pon my soul it's astonishing how much I love you! Come now; don't be cantankerous; just hear reason. Make up your mind to marry me this day month, and I'll take a double passage in the *Star of Hope*. She's to sail on the 10th of March. If you're not what they call "in love" with me, you'll be ever so fond of me when we are married.'

'Oh John! dear John! it is quite out of the question! I am too fond of you as a brother to like you in any other way. Do go away, and don't think any more about me.'

'Now that's all humbug! And remember, I am not going to stand anything of the sort. I don't mean to go back to South Africa without a wife—that I've made up my mind to; and if you will not have me I know who will.'

'If you mean Miss Banks, I really think you might do worse. She may talk a little fast, but she seems to me frank and kind.'

'I shan't make her half so good a husband as I should you, and I always looked to you for a wife. It's very hard, Mag, very hard, to be so disappointed!'—and Maggie, touched by this bit of pathos, felt guilty and broken-hearted. She could not speak, and John went on lashing himself into a rage. 'So Polly Banks is good

enough for the likes of me? Very well! I'll go and ask her this day, and then see where you'll be! You can't whistle *me* back. You'll repent this; and for all you are so fine and disinterested, it's my belief that you are "in love" after your fashion with some other fellow.'

'You are unjust and unkind. You have no right to say such a thing. You think too much of yourself.'

'Oh I do, do I? Well, good morning to you!' And the irate and painfully surprised John turned and went away in a rage.

CHAPTER XXXI.

EASTNOR was at once old and new. It occupied two sides of a craggy angle, hardly high enough to be dignified with the name of cliff. Beneath the eastern and loftier portion nestled an irregular village of fishermen's cottages, with picturesque red-tiled roofs, interspersed with a few better but very old-fashioned houses, which was all of accommodation the place could boast for strangers, eight or ten years previously. However, a rich railway magnate had by some curious involvement of circumstances become the possessor of a stretch of sandy common which sloped to the sea on the western side, and here he erected a Royal Esplanade, a Royal Hotel of massive design, after Pugin (a long way), and a garden, with an erection like a gigantic umbrella for the accommodation of a German band, which was intermittent in its attendance, owing to the uncertain nature of the subsidies.

Thus old and new Eastnor turned their backs on each other. For some occult reason Cockneys had not yet found out the place, but the dowager Duchess of St Perigord, who was very much out of health and depressed—'derangement of the nervous system,' said Sir Saville Row—really a severe course of breakfasts, luncheons, dinners, and suppers, and a little too free an application of phlebotomy to her pocket by an ill-judged purchase of railway shares under the direction of the above-mentioned magnate—the Duchess, we say was induced, by the loan, rent-free, of a house on the

Esplanade, to try the restorative breezes of Eastnor. It was during her stay there that the remarkable recovery in the Wessex and East Anglia scrip took place, which saved more firms from smashing than was generally known. Her Grace consequently returned to town in high health and spirits, quite eloquent as to the life-giving nature of Eastnor air, about the capital fish to be had for a mere song, the delightful fishing-boats, and the primitive charm of old Eastnor. Every one in her Grace's set was talked to, and a very fair reputation established for Eastnor. Still it did not make rapid progress, and was still sufficiently free from vulgar notoriety to be somewhat attractive on that score.

When Maggie and Lady Dormer arrived, they found the judicious Johnson had engaged the very corner house indicated by Mrs Berry. It was a mansion of brown paper consistency and imposing dimensions. Nevertheless when Maggie looked around on the scanty and not over-luxurious furniture, she thought of Grantham, and wondered how its mistress would support such a state of things in this temporary abode. After much consultation with Johnson, who was glad to find our young lady's secretary 'so knowledgeable' on such subjects, they managed, with the help of a local upholsterer, who lent out his stock to oblige visitors at something like a hundred per cent., with plants and ferns, and a few ornaments, to make the house cheerful and even seemly before the arrival of the mistress.

At last, after two disappointments, she came.

Maggie felt as if new life and warmth had been suddenly infused into the household by her presence.

It was a cold raw February evening when she reached Eastnor, and the ambitious little place was far from looking its best. Maggie, however, had grand fires made up, and all the new periodicals set forth, and views of Eastnor, and a fair supply of novels at hand; so when the fair princess arrived everything looked comfortable.

'My dear Miss Grey, I am so glad to see you!'—a kind little kiss on her forehead—'and how nice and comfortable you have made everything—quite homelike. Do you know I am so pleased to be here, though it is a bleak-looking place?—and I have quantities to tell you. Lady Brockhurst has arrived?'

'Yes; the day before yestorday, I think.'

'Do you know who is with her?'

'Not in the least.'

'Now, remember, you are to be in the drawing-room every evening; we cannot get on without you—cards or music, you are quite indispensable.'

Miss Grantham was evidently in high spirits and good humour, and her kindness was so unvarying that Maggie began to be assured and at home, even in the goodly company which quickly rallied round the heiress.

The very evening Miss Grantham had arrived, as the three ladies were sipping their tea after a somewhat late dinner, Lady Brockhurst and Captain Neville were announced.

The gay and enterprising little Viscountess had wrapped herself in furs and ran across from the opposite corner of the Esplanade, escorted by her brother.

'Here I am, my dear Miss Grantham, to have a little gossip. Is it not delightful to be able to go in and out without any fuss or trouble?'

'Charming! So glad to see you. Had you a pleasant sojourn at the Loughtons'?'

'Pretty well—rather slow. Oh, Mrs Loughton has a brother or somebody quartered somewhere in Ireland, who met your favourite relative, Geoffrey Trafford, the other day at the house of some old general who has a craze for making a railway through the Caucasus to Teheran, or some such place, and Mr Trafford talks of accompanying him on a surveying expedition next month.'

'I should not be in the least surprised at anything Geoff Trafford does,' said Miss Grantham languidly; and the conversation flowed on other subjects, in which Maggie took little or no interest.

'I hate that woman!' said Miss Grantham, energetically, as she bade Maggie good-night.

'What, Lady Brockhurst?' cried Maggie in amazement. 'I thought you liked her so much.'

'I used when I was more of a child. She thinks she can always patronise me, but I find I can stand alone and rival her, all captivating as she is. I really did believe in her once, and thought her devoted to me, but if she thinks I am to be a follower of hers or of any one, she is very much mistaken. And then she is so mean. Ah, I will tell you all about everything to-morrow. I am quite tired, and I do not intend to be bored with Lady Brockhurst every evening. Good-night, my dear Miss Grey.'

Maggie retired, pondering deeply the intricacies of a life so different from all her original experiences. If Miss Grantham hated

Lady Brockhurst, why did she forsake her own beautiful home to bivouac in this bleak place, for the avowed purpose of being near the object of her hatred? After all, the differences lay in the outer husk; the inner springs were just the same as those which moved Aunt Grey and Polly Banks and Cousin John—poor honest, conceited, simple Cousin John—about whom she could not bear to think. So pondering, but far from arriving at any conclusion, Maggie fell asleep.

'This is really a very comfortable little cupboard,' said Miss Grantham when she joined Maggie next morning in the study, which she had improvised out of one of the bed-rooms. 'And you really have the manuscript there? Well, I shall try and get on with it, I may manage it better here than at Grantham, and I shall put Lady Brockhurst in it. Did you hear what she said about Geoffrey last night, just to worry me? Come, sit down here, Miss Grey—what is your name?—Maggie, I think your South African cousin called you. I shall call you Maggie. You really are quite a little jewel; you are so quiet and capable; and oh, I do think you are true, for I begin to feel, rather than see, that people are very false and hollow. Don't you think so?'

'No,' said Maggie, thoughtfully. 'The generality are cold and selfish. I think if the greater number were false, as some say, the world could not go on.'

'Well, Llanelwy was delightful. Little Alf St Lawrence was so amusing—and devoted to me from the first; and a Spaniard, a Conde di Montiero, quite a change from the rest, so grave and serious—he fell in love with me too, or seemed to do so. Then Sir Hugh Erskine, who was very cool and reserved at first, tried hard to make me make the first advances, and was quite *aux petits soins* with Lady Brockhurst; but at last he gave in, after I had found fault with his singing and recommended him not to sing his best song any more. Oh, it was great fun! Lady Brockhurst could not forgive me. She tried to make me lose my temper, and very nearly succeeded; then she used to play my accompaniments and pretend to break down, and put me out—so mean and unladylike. If we are to be enemies, let it be open gallant warfare. However, one of the Miss Stamers, sweet girls, who were staying there, played very well, and I was soon independent of that little viper of a Viscountess. By-the-by, we must find a house for Mrs Stamer. She only wants a small one; she is not rich. I promised to look out for one. Well,

[illegible]

[illegible] Maggie deeply interested and painfully. [illegible] Miss Grantham's motives.

[illegible] The next day Geoffrey was [illegible] with me. [illegible] Sir Hugh. So in the evening [illegible] a little talk with me privately. He began [illegible] Miss Grantham, and I said that I drove her to [illegible] and then—oh, I think we talked of you: I forget what [illegible] matter. Next he said, with the sort of grave [illegible] look in the eyes—don't you know it?—"Margaret, we have been such friends that you must let me lecture you. My dear girl, I wish you would not make yourself so remarkable, nor allow Lashine to assume the sort of right to you he does. I should be sorry to believe you entertained a serious thought of him, yet he is a sort of fellow it will be difficult to shake off. Promise me you will be a little more general in accepting attentions, and all that sort of thing." I laughed and chaffed, and I think I succeeded in vexing him, for nothing would induce him to remain, and so he is gone to Ireland, and hardly bade me good-bye. Ah, Maggie, little friend, I have a glimpse of the light at last! Geoffrey, the cold, careless, impassive Geoffrey, is jealous.'

'But he is gone away,' said Maggie, unable to feel that Miss Grantham's hopes were quite justifiable.

'Yes, but only to Ireland; it is a proof of his feelings that he could not bear to stay. Now I "have trusted you rarely," Maggie. Never betray this weakness or folly of mine—no, it is not weakness

or folly either to be so fond of Geoffrey Trafford. And I *must* speak to some one. Now, what have *you* been doing?'

But Maggie had little to tell, and suppressed the best or most important part. 'And so Geoff Trafford's elegant hostess is down here and letting lodgings, poor thing. How shamefully that husband of hers has treated her! Come, we will go and see her to-day, or rather her house. Perhaps it may suit Mrs Stamer.'

And it did suit, to Maggie's great joy; so poor Mrs Berry, whose natural aptitude for business developed rapidly in her altered circumstances, began to reap some benefit from her 'venture' sooner than she expected.

But Miss Grantham was more occupied than ever. A deep but unspoken rivalry existed between her and the Viscountess; they were always trying to outdo each other in new schemes of pleasure, new toilettes, new fascinations. Eastnor was so near town that famous members of their society frequently ran down for two or three days on their way north, south, east, or west.

Then, after a mile or two of flat, low-lying land, with spare hedges and melancholy trees, their heads bent in the opposite direction to the prevailing winds, a pretty undulating country showed itself, with valleys, and woods, and an obliging ruin or two, a few civilised gentlemen's places, various suitable objects for a morning's ride if the season was too early for picnics. More members of the 'upper ten' found Eastnor not so bad a place to vegetate in, till Easter, which was early that year. So after a few scattered hours given to her once favourite literary scheme, Miss Grantham gave it up, begging Maggie to go on with it so far as she had made notes of her intentions, and then they would see what was to be done.

Maggie consequently found herself much more of a companion to Lady Dormer than secretary to her niece.

It was a constant though scarce acknowledged source of mortification to her that, though invariably kind, and, at those rare times when they were alone together, utterly confidential respecting herself and every one else, Miss Grantham would seem to forget her existence for days together. The Misses Stamer, pretty, well-bred, commonplace girls, were, with their mother, the devoted adherents and admirers of the Limeshire heiress. Nothing but the force of good manners preserved their homage from becoming fulsome and abject. Miss Grantham, loyal, simple, utterly spoiled, and believing in herself with an absolute faith almost sad to

see, accepted the curious conglomerate of self-interest, grasping ambition, and the spurious liking which arises from the gratification of these tendencies, offered to her by the needy but well-born widow and her daughters, as purest ore, and returned it tenfold, with a degree of enthusiastic patronage most profitable to the recipients.

They were bitter foes to the Viscountess, though included in all her parties, and never failed to add fuel to Miss Grantham's rather unreasoning dislike of the small peeress, merely to prove their ardent partisanship with their dear friend.

Maggie, a quiet looker-on, saw most of the game, and with deep regret. She feared the constant adulation, the perpetually feeding of Miss Grantham's unhealthy craving for excitement and admiration, would, if unchecked, swallow up and efface her many noble and lovable qualities.

These were not very bright days to little Maggie. She was much alone, and felt a very unnecessary item in the household; but books and music helped her, and she often stole away to comfort Mrs Berry with a quiet chat about the glories of the past.

'I cannot help thinking, Mrs Berry,' she said one afternoon, as they were having a cup of tea in the widow's down-stairs parlour, 'I cannot help thinking that you are happier and better than you used to be.'

'Happy!' replied Mrs Berry, indignantly. 'A pretty sort of happiness, after the life and the company I have been used to. But I will say that I don't seem to have the time to think about it, and I am a little proud of my house; it's the tidiest and cleanest in the place; the Honourable Mrs Stamer says it is a pleasure to have a chop here. I am sure I am glad of it, for they have nothing else. Between you and me and the post, I don't think they have much money, and it is a pity, for a nicer spoken lady than the Honourable Mrs S. I never met. But she's sharp. Well, you can't blame her, and if she does dispute a scuttleful of coals it's done civil and pleasant; but she is not what you'd call a profitable lodger. I am sure they live more at your young lady's than here. But I am not one of the greedy sort. Still I do look for my profits, and people can't expect scuttlefuls at the same rate as tons. And now tell me, do you never hear from that fine young man, your cousin? You could have him for the taking.'

'Well, I do not mean to take him. I am sure you ought not to advocate matrimony.'

'My dear, it is quite another pair of shoes. I had money, plenty to have kept me comfortable all the days of my life, if I hadn't been just deluded; but you—you haven't sixpence to bless yourself with, and yet you go on refusing the best of offers!'

'Now, dear Mrs Berry, be accurate. I never had but one, and it would have been cruel to have accepted that one.'

'I declare to goodness, Maggie, it would vex a saint to hear you talk. Suppose you had married the Earl—there, you'd have been in the height of splendour, and perhaps taking me for your companion; for, to do you justice, you are not the sort to turn your back on a friend.'

'And to do *you* justice,' said Maggie, taking her hand, 'you are too genuinely English not to prefer honest, hard, but free labour to the smooth idling slavery of companionship.'

'Lor, Maggie! you don't mean to say you are a slave to Miss Grantham?'

'Far, far from it. She is all kindness, and I have only too little to do; but I think I should prefer the hardest work in a little home of my own.'

'Now ain't you contradictory, Maggie! There you turn up your nose at matrimony, and in the next breath talk of a home of your own.'

'Turn up my nose at matrimony?' cried Maggie, with some warmth. 'I do nothing of the kind. To love some good man heartily and marry him, is about the happiest lot I can imagine for a woman. But even with this view, my kind friend, I do not see the sense of accepting copper while you have a chance of getting silver, for if silver is a necessity to you, copper will never supply its place.'

'Well, Maggie, I don't pretend to understand you when you talk fine. All I know is that half a loaf is better than no bread.'

'That depends,' said Maggie, sagely. 'There is a half loaf that won't digest.'

'Never mind, dear, have another cup, and tell me what you do of an evening.'

'Oh, at present we are very busy rehearsing for the concert that is to be given for the Eastnor Lifeboat and Marine Institution.'

'Lor! I have heard of that. Tell me all about it.'

'Well, Miss Grantham and Lady Brockhurst and Mrs McGrabbit, the rich City lady who has the villa, have made up their minds to give a concert in the great room of the Royal Hotel

Miss Grantham, the Viscountess, and Miss Mary Stamer, are to be the singers, with a Mr Fitzalan, from London. Then the choir of St Winifred's will assist. I am to play the accompaniments for the songs, and I am dreadfully frightened.'

'Pooh, my dear! You will do first-rate. You always were a dab at music—and I gave you every chance I could.'

'You did indeed, Mrs Berry.'

'Ah, my dear! I ought to be in Paris receiving the Court grandees—if every one had their rights. I will say that if that unfortunate, unhappy man, the Count, had not been so wrapped up in his politics and the rights of his "Henri Cinq," things might have been very different. But oh! he behaved shameful to me. Must you go?'

'Yes, I must indeed—but I will come soon again.'

The concert spoken of in the foregoing conversation had been the supreme occupation of the last ten days, and promised to continue all-engrossing for as many more. There had been a sudden and spasmodic attempt on the part of the learned professions, Law, Physic, Divinity, to improve the occasion of such wealthy and distinguished company being at Eastnor during rather stormy weather, to recruit the funds of the Life Boat and Marine Hospital Institution. The doctor, the lawyer, and an energetic single-breasted young incumbent (we allude to his coat, not his conscience), of the modern mediæval church of St Winifred—a marvel of coloured bricks and paint—formed themselves into a deputation to ask the patronage of Lady Brockhurst and Miss Grantham, in addition to that of Mrs McGrabbit, whose more permanent importance the priest of St Winifred's durst not despise. Lady Brockhurst was out when 'the deputation' called, and Miss Grantham was at home. The heiress was abundantly civil, and quite interested; promised them all sorts of help in the concert or 'recitation'—as the clergyman modestly termed it—which the members of his choir proposed to give, and sent them on their way rejoicing.

'Of course,' said Miss Grantham to Maggie, 'they went to that little viper of a Viscountess first; but I will show where the real help is to come from.'

Naturally, the concert, like most other matters, became a source of rivalry; none the less deep because veiled under an appearance of working in harmony for the same excellent object. To one condition, however, Miss Grantham adhered firmly: unless Bene-

dict himself could be induced to come down, no one save Maggie should play her accompaniments; and to her sovereign will the rest yielded.

As the important evening approached the excitement became more intense; and when Johnny Fitzalan, the renowned singing man of their set, and Sir Hugh Erskine, promised to come down and give their valuable services, enthusiasm touched its highest point. Even Maggie caught the infection, and almost lost sight of her fears. Fortunately for her, the principal bass at St Winifred's, and a melancholy baritone, would perform on the violin and the violoncello; so, with Miss McGrabbit on the piano, they were to form the orchestral accompaniment to a quartette, which was to be the grand effort of the evening.

'Mademoiselle' demanded her secretary, at an early hour on the eventful day. Cécile lifted up hands and eyes at her lady's energy as she summoned Maggie.

'I have such a heap of letters this morning,' exclaimed Miss Grantham. 'Every one seems attracted by the fame of our concert. Fancy Torchester coming! who never could make out the difference between "Rule Britannia" and the "British Grenadiers." I fancy he is glad of an excuse to make up with me, for he sulked shamefully at Llanelwy—and that great heavy Colonel Molyneux is coming with him; and dear little Alfred St Lawrence. But, Maggie, is it not strange—among all these,' pointing to a quantity of freshly-opened letters, 'not a word, not a trace, of Geoff Trafford? It is quite—more than a month since he disappeared, and no one knows anything of him. Mr Bolton even writes to me for news; and he and Geoff are almost always *en rapport*. He could not have started to make that railway without some adieux or preparations. Is it not odd?—wretched?'

Miss Grantham had not mentioned Trafford for a long time; and Maggie was glad of it—she knew not why, except for a dim but deep conviction that bitter disappointment awaited the friend she valued so much, should her feelings towards that ungrateful wanderer continue the same.

'Mr Trafford will appear when least expected,' she said.

'It would be extremely difficult for him to appear when he is *not* expected,' returned Miss Grantham, smiling. 'Ah! my dear little friend, I fear I am foolish, and perhaps undignified—but I cannot help it. Now tell me, is your dress all right? The Brockhurst faction must not overshadow us. Our bouquets will not

arrive till the 5.30 train; and I dare say Torchester will arrive with them.'

The hours flew quickly past, and that fixed for the concert drew near. Lady Brockhurst was to assemble the performers at her house for some slight refreshment previous to the entertainment, but *en revanche* Miss Grantham was to receive all at a grand supper when it was over.

Maggie was tired before it was time to dress; and hearing from one of the housemaids that Lord Torchester and another gentleman were in the drawing-room gladly sat down for a few minutes in her own chamber before beginning her toilette. She had hardly got half through that operation before a message from Miss Grantham reached her, requesting that she would be ready in the drawing-room in good time, as she herself had been detained.

Maggie, however, finished her dressing at her leisure, knowing the probable duration of Miss Grantham's, and then, stealing a glance of shy approval at herself in the glass, took her red bournous over her arm, and went down-stairs.

The drawing-room was lit up, but empty, save for a gentleman in morning dress, who was standing by the fire reading one of the evening papers, which had just come in.

His back was to Maggie, but it was not necessary for her to see his face; for with infinite surprise, and an instant or two of wild heart-beating, she recognised Mr Trafford. He did not hear her enter, and she stood a moment, feeling awkward and irresolute. She had nearly turned to steal away, when Trafford suddenly threw down his paper and looked full at her. He, too, seemed rather surprised when his eyes fell on the graceful little figure before him; for Maggie was *en grande tenue* in a soft white crapy dress, festooned with rosettes of black ribbon and lace. The pretty sloping shoulders shown, and a jet necklet round her throat. Her hair was rolled into a coronet, without any ornament; and the only bit of colour about her was a bouquet of bright flowers where the folds of her dress were crossed upon the bosom. She was far from being a beautiful girl, but there was a wonderful charm of grace and tranquillity about her face and form—a sad tenderness about her mouth in repose; a sweet merriment in its dimples when she laughed. She was looking pale, too; as if languid and fatigued. Yes; she was far from being brilliant or beautiful; yet, when Trafford's eyes fell upon her, he was startled by the sudden vivid joy that shot through him. Nor could he keep it from

speaking in his face, however he might control his voice. No; do what he would, he could not uproot this boyish, unreasonable weakness, this unconquerable folly.

'So, Miss Grey, I have arrived in time for some wonderful celebration. Are you one of the performers?' While he spoke he held her hand and seemed to drink in every atom of her face and figure with his deep dark eyes, all aglow with unmistakable pleasure; but Maggie only coloured for a moment and withdrew her hand coolly; the deep resentment and disappointment she had undergone on finding that he had in some way betrayed their drive in the Bois de Boulogne steeled her against him; nay, taken in conjunction with that, his look and manner were offensive.

'I have a very humble part,' she said quietly. 'Miss Grantham must have been very greatly surprised to see you.'

Trafford paused a moment before replying. The quick instinct of an ardent sympathetic nature detected a change in her voice, an indefinable something in her manner, which it had not before. She had always been quiet and composed with him, even repellent at times; yet there had ever been an echo of kindness in her voice, an almost hidden tremor at times, suggesting ideas of reciprocity, that nearly drove him across the Rubicon of prudence, beyond which he once thought reason, self-respect, and the laws of society forbade him to pass. Now there was the ring as of cold strength in her tone, the composure as of indifference in her manner.

'I do not think Miss Grantham knows I am here,' said Trafford, as these thoughts flashed through his brain and watching Maggie carefully. 'I met Torchester going to dress as I was leaving the hotel, and that was the first I heard of the gathering here. I have been cruising about with a friend of mine who is yachting mad, but not finding it an agreeable pastime in February, I made him put me ashore at Southampton this morning, and came on here to look you up.'

'I will let Miss Grantham know you are here,' said Maggie, who was putting on her gloves with great care.

'It is quite unnecessary,' replied Trafford, feeling the change in her manner more and more. 'She will be here in a few minutes.'

'Still I will tell her,' persisted Maggie, feeling it awkward, imprudent, nay, impossible, to remain alone with the offender; and throwing her bournous over a chair she left the room, and running hastily up-stairs tapped at Miss Grantham's door.

'Come in,' rather sharply uttered.

'Well, what is it?' asked the heiress, who was standing before a long glass, having the last touches put to a grand toilette of black velvet crape and bugles, with ornaments of black enamel and diamonds.

'Do you know Mr Trafford is in the drawing-room?'

'No! I certainly did not,' cried Miss Grantham, blushing vividly over face and neck, while she opened her great blue eyes with amazement.

'I found him there this moment.'

'Why did no one tell me?' turning to her maid.

'Mademoiselle, I not know till the very minit I see Mr Johnson · he say, Monsieur will not permit you to be disturbed.'

'Pooh, nonsense! Go, Cécile, Miss Grey will fasten my bracelets. Tell me, how is he looking? Is he dressed? Does he know?'

'Mr Trafford looks much as usual. He is in morning dress, and has only just heard from Lord Torchester about the concert.'

'Oh! Maggie, is it not extraordinary his arriving just now? Pray run down, tell him to dress at once—that he must come to the concert; and tell me what he says.'

Maggie was obliged to obey. She found Trafford standing much as she had left him.

'Miss Grantham begs you will dress and appear at the concert. She is to sing two solos, and she wishes you to be there.'

'I have had a tiresome journey, and I am more inclined to go to bed; but I can fancy Margaret imagining to-night's exhibition of the last importance.' The tone of the last words was not untinged with cynicism. 'And what are you to do—sing a solo?'

'Heaven forbid,' said Maggie, laughing. 'I have to play Miss Grantham's accompaniments, and that is bad enough. I can only pray to be brought safely through the undertaking. The concert begins at half-past seven. You have not too much time.'

'I *must* go then?'

'Miss Grantham requests you will,' returned Maggie, as a mere medium.

'And who are here?' asked Trafford. 'All the rational and intellectual people who were at Llanelwy?'

'Nearly all, including Sir Hugh Erskine. He is to sing "Il Balen," to-night.'

'Hah!' ejaculated Trafford. 'Do you play *his* accompaniments?

'No; Lady Brockhurst does.'

'He is a fascinating irresistible character?'

'Perhaps so.'

'Do *you* think so?'

'I? I think—or rather, I imagine—he is a selfish, cruel, hard-hearted man.'

'Bravely hazarded! Really, Miss Grey, I should like to know your private imaginary estimate of us all.'

'It would not be worth the trouble of listening to. Had you not better go and dress, Mr Trafford?'

'I will? but answer me one question first. Have you told your opinion of this man Erskine to Margaret—to Miss Grantham?'

'Yes, often; and,' with something of her old frank smile, 'you may make your mind easy—she estimates him at about his true value.'

'It does make my mind easy,' he replied, gravely. 'I have seen Margaret grow up, and I should be sorry to see her thrown away. There is some danger of it too, she is so simple and so vain, so loyal and so self-confident. See how confidentially I speak to you,' he added, smiling.

'*You* are safe with me,' said Maggie with some emphasis, and went straight to her fair mistress.

Trafford looked after her for some moments in deep thought, and then ringing the bell told the servants he was going back to the hotel to dress.

'Mr Trafford obeys,' said Maggie to Miss Grantham, as Cécile took her mistress's fan, gloves, and bouquet down-stairs. 'I do not think he was very pleased about the concert or Sir Hugh. He asked what I thought of him, and asked if *you* knew my opinion.'

'Jealous—still jealous!' exclaimed Miss Grantham.

'Truly interested in you, at any rate,' said Maggie. 'And now it is quite time we should be going.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

It was a new and strange experience for Maggie to look through the chink of the door which led on to the temporary stage or platform erected across the end of the Royal Hotel ball-room, and see the rows of faces all looking in one direction. The whole space was fully occupied; every one far and near who could muster the price of a ticket was ravenous to hear the great ladies sing; and by the advice of the experienced Fitzalan a tolerably large portion had been allotted to moderately priced admissions. In front were ranged the distinguished visitors, who represented not only the 'guinea stamp,' but the coin itself, on this occasion.

'Look!' said Miss Grantham, who indulged in a peep over Maggie's head. 'Every creature is here. Poor Aunt Dormer! does she not look nice?—next that awful old Duchess of St Perigord; but the grand-daughters are rather pretty girls. That cast-iron looking woman is Mrs McGrabbit.'

'Take care—her daughter is behind you,' whispered Maggie.

And now the performance began with a solo and good noisy chorus by the St Winifred's men and boys, during which the single-breasted incumbent stood in the half-opened doorway, agonisingly anxious. It was rapturously applauded. A trio—Lady Brockhurst, Miss Stamer, and Mr Fitzalan—succeeded; it was well, but not quite so enthusiastically received; the majority of the audience did not quite understand what it was about, whereas they were personally acquainted with Tom Sykes and Joe Deans and little Billy Rogers of St Winifred's choir, to whose music they could beat time. The trio was an awful trial to Maggie, who had to play the accompaniment; she trembled from head to foot as she followed the others on to the stage.

'Don't be frightened; you will do well,' said Miss Grantham. 'Here, Torchester, go and stand beside Miss Grey; she will feel backed up.'

'Yes, certainly,' said the Earl, most readily.

However, when seated at the piano, Maggie found herself so well sheltered by the singers that she was in comparative privacy, and got through her allotted task very successfully; but she felt glad

Lord Torchester was there to lead her away, for the rest bowed, courtesied, and retired, oblivious of her. As she went to the temporary green-room, the reverend originator of the entertainment passed her, leading on Miss McGrabbit, who was down for a Mazurka with an unpronounceable name, and unlimited accidentals. Miss Grantham was sitting at one side of the room, looking most brilliantly animated, talking to Lord Alfred, Sir Hugh, and Trafford, while Lady Brockhurst had only Mr Fitzalan and a couple of stray amateur Philharmonic men who were staying in the neighbourhood.

'What a grand card Kockynowska would be here to-night,' said the Earl good-humouredly. 'Do you remember him, Miss Grey?'

'I do, indeed. I cannot bear to think of him or any of those dreadful people the Count knew. He behaved so shamefully to poor Mrs Berry.'

'Shocking scoundrel—foolish woman.'

'You did very well,' said Miss Grantham, smiling pleasantly at Maggie. 'Come, let us all go to the door and applaud when that dreadful thing is finished.' Miss Grantham put her arm through Maggie's and drew her away.

'Is Saul among the prophets?' said Sir Hugh Erskine to Lord Torchester. 'Do you perform in this wonderful exhibition?'

'Oh, no! I leave the exhibiting to you.'

'Then, really, Trafford and yourself should be banished among the audience. By the way, who is that nice little brown-haired girl in black and white?'

'Miss Grey; she is a sort of companion to Miss Grantham,' said the Earl.

'No? Is she the girl that plays always for the Princess? How wonderfully she lights up! Some uncommon good points about her. I shan't mind turning her music for her next time, Torchester.' And Sir Hugh lounged after Miss Grantham and Maggie.

'What a cub that is,' said the Earl to his cousin.

But Trafford did not reply. He was watching with a curiously 'riled' sensation the cool patronising address of Sir Hugh to 'the brown-haired little girl,' and the air of surprise with which she lifted her eyes to his when he spoke to her. 'Come, Tor, let us lose ourselves among the audience,' he said.

So the concert proceeded to a successful ending. Miss Grantham and Lady Brockhurst spited each other ingeniously and neatly. Sir Hugh Erskine rather forsook the heiress for the Viscountess;

but Miss Grantham cared little for this. Hers was specially the song of the evening: privately urged by Maggie, she had selected one of Moore's melodies, and they practised it so frequently together—Maggie criticising and suggesting, as the representative of the ordinary unscientific audience—that they understood each other's method perfectly; and from the moment Miss Grantham's clear, fresh, full voice rang out in the first high note, 'There is not in this wide world a valley so sweet,' to the last tender fall, the listeners were utterly still, and then out burst a torrent of approbation such as genuine delight only can give.

Torchester and Trafford stood close under the platform, and nearly reduced their gloves to fragments by the energy with which they led the *claque*. It was a thrilling moment, insignificant as was the audience; they were sentient human beings, carried out of themselves for the instant, and on the worker of the spell it reacted with tenfold force.

The dreaded quintett was at last accomplished, and to Maggie's infinite delight the whole thing over. She was wonderfully tired; her hands were cold and trembling, and she longed to be alone in the dark, in bed, where she could shed those unreasonable tears which would come into her eyes.

And now the performers rolled themselves up in their furs and wraps, as it was not worth while getting in and out of a carriage to traverse the short space between the Royal Hotel and Miss Grantham's residence. As all paired off, Maggie found herself last and alone, for which she was not sorry; so drawing the hood of her burnous over her head, and folding a thick shawl across her chest, she waited a few minutes that the crowd might disperse, as there was but one way of egress.

But she was not many minutes alone when Trafford came quickly into the room, and offering his arm said decidedly, 'I am to take care of you.'

Maggie took it in silence.

The whole of the evening Trafford had revolved in his own mind the subtle though perceptible change in her voice and manner; the undefinable something that had come or gone; and he had eagerly seized the chance of a few words with her. But what could he say? He certainly could not help associating her altered tone with that mysterious visit of Madame de Beaumanoir to Grantham, though no positive mischief had come of it, for the favourite secretary was evidently in greater favour than ever. Probably the Frenchwoman's

evil eye nad never fallen upon her. However, now that her arm was fairly within his, his attention was diverted by the excessive tremor that seemed to pervade her whole frame and which she could not subdue.

'What is the matter? You must be ill? You have been over-fatigued, and no doubt worried?' He looked down at her with real grave interest that she was vexed to think she must doubt.

'Pray do not imagine anything of the kind. I am quite well—only a little over-excited. I was so delighted that Miss Grantham had such success. How beautifully she sang.'

'She did. I felt enthusiastic about her for five minutes myself—she really is a fine creature, though awfully spoiled. Stand in this corner a moment or two, Miss Grey, and the crowd will be quite gone.'

Trafford placed her in a sheltered nook, and wrapped her shawl closer round her, and said how well she had played, and how proud old Monsieur Du Val would be to hear her; and Maggie listened in silence, longing to cry to him not to speak to her so kindly and considerately or she must burst into tears. Then she suddenly remembered Miss Grantham's doubts and possible jealousy, and she began to wish Mr Trafford had not come back for her. So in the midst of one of his pleasant sentences, while he was looking at her with a sort of intensity which seemed always to come into his eyes while he looked, she exclaimed, 'Do let us go, Mr Trafford,' so piteously, that he, deciding something was very wrong, and drawing her arm once more through his own, led her quickly down-stairs and into the outer hall, where through the open door they could see the clear cold night and a long shimmering path of moon-light on the sea. But all poor Maggie's trials were not yet over. At the door stood a lady in a much-beflowered bonnet, and a red China crape shawl, and beside her a tall, broad-shouldered man in a big white top-coat, with a huge display of white velvet in collar and cuffs, tartan trousers of the largest pattern, and a red woollen scarf filling up between the brim of his hat and the top of his velvet collar. Scarce seeing them, Maggie was hurrying past, when the tall stranger suddenly started forward, and laying a rather heavy hand on her shoulder, exclaimed, 'I say, Madam Mag! I little thought I should find you figuring before the public! What's kept you? The others have gone home this half-hour!'

Even though she recognised his voice, the apparition of Cousin

John was so appalling that Maggie, already unhinged, clung tightly to Trafford, who, perhaps as unconsciously, clasped her arm closely to his side.

'John! Is it possible?' she exclaimed, recovering herself. 'I can hardly believe my eyes.'

'And I,' returned John, in a rugged, domineering manner, 'can hardly believe mine. Come, I want to talk to you a bit. I will see you home.'

'Miss Grey,' said Trafford, his clear, full, refined tones sounding so strangely different from John's ill-tempered voice, 'Miss Grey is really very much over-fatigued, and was just hurrying on to join Miss Grantham, so'——

'Hurrying?' cried John, with a sneer. 'I suppose Miss Grey can speak to her own cousin and nearest friend without *you* for an interpreter.'

Maggie was filled with dismay. That Cousin John, whom she would fain have respected, should speak so outrageously—so unwarrantably—and imply such jealousy, was too mortifying.

Trafford, quite unmoved, looked at him with calm curiosity, and Maggie, eager to preserve John from any further display of bad taste and bad temper, withdrew her arm, with an unconsciously despairing look at Trafford.

'Yes, yes, my dear John, I shall be very pleased to talk to you as we go across to Miss Grantham; but I cannot stay. I am obliged to go in to supper. Pray do not wait, Mr Trafford; perhaps you would be so good as to tell Miss Grantham that I have met my cousin.'

Trafford hesitated.

'Law, Mr Trafford!' cried the lady in the red shawl, 'we had best leave it to themselves to make up. Bless your heart, it will all be right before you can say Jack Robinson.'

'Mrs Berry,' said Trafford, readily turning aside the awkwardness of the moment by speaking to her, 'I *am* surprised to find you here. It is a long time since I had the pleasure of seeing you.'

'You are very good, I'm sure; but pleasure is a thing I have lost sight of altogether. Ah! it's changed times with me.'

'Very sorry indeed to hear it.'

'Pray go on to Miss Grantham,' implored Maggie, who began to feel very uneasy.

'As you wish,' said he, raising his hat to Mrs Berry, and walked quickly away.

'Well, you are a pretty humbug you are!' cried John, as they prepared to follow. You were hurrying on to join the others, were you? You did not even know where my fine gentleman was when we met in London, and then, after coming down here to see you, at no end of inconvenience, I find you cuddled up under his arm. You are a heartless little thing.'

'How dare you speak to me like this? I have done nothing wrong; nothing that you have any right to be offended with.'

'Come, come, Mr Grey, you are not so used to this class of society as I am,' said Mrs Berry, with a patronising air. 'It was all correct enough. You really need not vex yourself.'

'And I am so sorry that you should be annoyed, John,' added Maggie, really anxious to mollify him. 'I am very unfortunate in vexing you, for I only want to please you.'

'Well,' cried John, 'you have a queer way of going about it.'

'At all events,' returned Maggie, 'I must go back or Miss Grantham will be vexed.'

'Yes, yes,' said Mrs Berry, 'I understand all that. It might be as much as her place is worth.'

'I must see you to-morrow,' continued Maggie.

'I should think you must,' growled John.

'But where?' said Maggie reflectively. 'I have not a room to myself here.'

'Oh law, Maggie! don't bother about that,' cried Mrs Berry. 'Ain't you welcome to my parlour? You two come and have a quiet talk there any time you like.'

'Thank you, dear Mrs Berry; that will do charmingly.'

'All right,' said John, beginning to feel the soothing influence of Maggie's smiles. 'And don't you be later than eleven, remember, for I must go up to town by the three o'clock express.'

'I will be punctual,' said Maggie.

'And now come away; we'll leave you at home, and perhaps Mr Grey won't mind taking an oyster and a drop of porter with me, though it is in a down-stair parlour,' observed Mrs Berry.

'I believe you!' returned that individual. 'You are a deuced good soul to ask me.'

Meantime Trafford walked away, much annoyed and embittered with himself and every one else. Why had he been such an infernal idiot as to come back to play with such edged tools as his feelings for that provoking little girl?—who was not over-glad to see him. It served him right, though, to be excruciated by seeing

her clutched away by such a ruffian. By Jove, Torchester had an escape! Fancy calling a brute like that your cousin! Poor girl, after all it was rather hard lines for her to be so much above her own people, yet tied to them. To think of a sweet gentle creature like her, the secret pages of whose thoughtful soul he had often, in more romantic moments, longed to read, being afraid of a half-civilised animal such as *that!* It was too dreadful. And she *was* frightened! How tightly, how naturally, she had clung to him. And he thought of her pale cheeks and cold little trembling hands, with much the same tenderness which a deserted child would call forth, dashed with a strong passionate yearning for all the divine woman-love he felt she could give. How idiotically weak it was of him to come back! And now he could not go till he had cleared up the mystery of her change towards him.

Here he entered the brilliantly lighted hall of Miss Grantham's house. Genteelly toned, suave flunkeys took his hat; the major-domo (Johnson), obsequious as to his master-elect, whispered that supper had not yet been served, and opened the door, announcing 'Mr Trafford,' with an importance he lent to no other name.

Miss Grantham was standing near Lady Brockhurst, for, to do the heiress justice, she completely merged the rival in the hostess, and surrounded by all the gentlemen except Lord Torchester, who was talking to Miss Stamer and the Duchess.

Trafford paused to exchange remarks with Lady Dormer, as the least intellectual and objectionable of the party. He felt, however, that Miss Grantham's eye was on him, and she was soon near him.

'Aunt Dormer, what has become of Miss Grey? She must have been left behind.'

'Dear me, how provoking! Send some one—ring for some one.'

'I do not think you need distress yourself,' said Trafford. 'I left Miss Grey talking to Mrs Berry and a gentleman in a white coat, from London. She desired me to say she would be with you in a few minutes.'

'You do not mean to say "Cousin John" has reappeared?'

'I imagine it is that ubiquitous individual. Margaret, I always knew you sang well; but I never felt you were a siren till to-night.'

'*Fi donc!* as Madame de Beaumanoir used to say,' returned Miss Grantham, with a lovely brilliant smile, and, deeply gratified, she returned to her stranger guests.

'A right royal beautiful woman,' thought Trafford, as he looked

after her. 'Now why can I not fall in love with her? I dare say she is a great deal too good for me—but I cannot.'

Supper was announced, and though Trafford did not see her join them, Maggie was opposite to him at table, between Mr Fitzalan and one of the nameless Philharmonics, who talked thorough-bass across her during the great part of the evening. She looked very pale at first, and took a glass of water rather eagerly as soon as she could induce the pre-occupied Fitzalan to give her one. She looked sad and *distrait* too, till suddenly catching Trafford's eye, as he watched with an air of amusement the utter neglect of her neighbours, a bright arch answering smile flickered over her face.

'It is too bad, Miss Grey,' he said, 'to have music both at concert and supper. I suppose I am right in thinking Mr Fitzalan's abstruse science a little beyond you?'

'More than a little,' said Maggie, shaking her head.

'Ah, really, I beg your pardon,' cried Mr Fitzalan, suddenly recalled to a sense of his duties. 'Do you want anything?' looking round bewildered.

'No, thank you; I have had everything.'

'I am sure you played very nicely, Miss Grey,' said good-natured Lady Dormer, whom Trafford had elected to escort. 'I wonder you did, you were so frightened about it.'

'Very nicely indeed,' echoed Mr Fitzalan, patronisingly. 'In fact, Miss Grantham's song was remarkably well accompanied. Curious how these sort of songs always carry away an audience.'

'I think it would be curious if they did not,' said Trafford. 'You have a charming air, full of melody, and words conveying a simple, natural sentiment, neither too high nor too low to touch any one's heart, or whatever it is that responds to sentiment.'

'Very true; but then divine harmonies are so often received with utter coldness. Now that fugue'—— and again the learned amateurs plunged into science.

It was a most agreeable, successful party. Every one was pleased and in good spirits. Had the members of it been a little less well-bred they would have been noisy; but Maggie thought it never would end—she was dazed and weary; she would gladly have excused herself, but feared to draw down any remarks on her absence; moreover, she had just reached the hall as Miss Grantham with Mr Fitzalan was following her guests into the dining-room. She was immediately pounced upon, and sent in with the cavalier, whom her pleasant mistress wished to get rid of, so she

was obliged to sit it out. However, all things have an end, and at last all were gone except Mrs Stamer, her daughters, Lord Torchester, Colonel Molyneux, and Mr Trafford; and Maggie, not supposing her absence would be observed, moved quietly away to the door; but between her and it stood Trafford, looking over one of the programmes, while the rest gathered round the fire in eager discussion of the events of the evening.

'You are glad to steal away, I imagine,' said he, as she approached him.

'I am, indeed.'

'I hope you were successful in allaying the wrath of that gentleman—your cousin, I think?'

'Yes, he is my Cousin John, and—and I was quite shocked at the way he spoke; he is a kind, true-hearted man, but very rough.'

Trafford smiled.

'I can make large allowance for him, poor fellow! So you appeased and dismissed him?'

'No, indeed,' replied Maggie, with an unconscious sigh. 'I must see him to-morrow morning before he leaves.'

'And you would rather not?' said Trafford, quickly.

'No, not exactly. You know he was once my only friend, and I am not ungrateful or changeable.'

'Not changeable? I think you can change, Miss Grey, very delicately, very indefinably, yet not imperceptibly.'

Maggie looked up astonished at his remark, a little nettled, a little gratified, yet longing to run away.

'I hardly understand you, and I am far too tired to try, so good night, Mr Trafford,' and she slipped past him without offering her hand.

'*Hardly* understands me?' repeated Trafford to himself; 'she is too true to deny all understanding, and I will solve the mystery before many days are over.' Then he joined Miss Grantham, and in answer to her inquiries, gave an amusing account of his rambles in Ireland, and at last every one was gone.

'Where is Miss Grey?' asked Miss Grantham, tired out with excitement and gratified vanity.

'Gone to bed, Mademoiselle, with a bad head-ache.'

'Ah! I rather fancy the cousin bores her,' thought the heiress.

No guilty wretch about to take his trial for some of the smaller misdemeanours could have felt more sick at heart than poor Maggie when she tied on her hat the morning after the concert. She

knew perfectly well she was going to mortify and disappoint the uncouth friend, who, in spite of his annoying and disagreeable ways, she loved sincerely. If Mrs Berry would stay by her it would be an immense help. She would ask her.

As she walked quickly down the Esplanade she found herself face to face with Trafford, who was strolling in an opposite direction with a cigar in his mouth, which he threw away and turned with her.

'How is Miss Grantham after last night's triumphs?'

'Well, quite well; she is just going to breakfast, and I dare say would see you.'

'I will let her eat her breakfast first. This is rather an unfinished place. I have been cruising about, and think the fishermen have the best of it.'

'Yes; there is something a little more picturesque in their village than in the Royal Esplanade.'

'And what is our unfortunate friend Mrs Berry doing?'

'She has a house, a very pretty house, with a nice peep of the village, and lets lodgings. Mrs Stamer has her rooms now.'

'Indeed! Whereabouts?'

Close here, Esplanade Villas. I am going there.'

'Oh!' a wonderfully expressive 'Oh!' revealing a full knowledge of why she was going, and bringing the colour quickly to Maggie's cheek. 'I expected you to be in the doctor's hands after your fright last night, Miss Grey, and I cannot say much for your looks this morning. You ought not to have come out so early.'

This was said kindly but not too earnestly, and Maggie felt puzzled why he should trouble himself remarking her looks, while she was desperately anxious to prevent his escorting her to Mrs Berry's door, which, as he had nothing else to do, he possibly might. Suppose they were overtaken by John! The idea was too appalling; and in dread of such a catastrophe, she exclaimed abruptly, with the curious mixture of shyness, and of certainty that he would understand her, which she always experienced in speaking to him, 'I wish you would turn back. Do not come any farther with me.'

She looked steadily away while she spoke.

'Why must I turn back?' began Trafford, really vexed to have this little *tête-à-tête* walk broken up; then, vexed with himself for vexing her, he added, laughing good-humouredly, 'I am very au-

dacious to dispute your orders, and I ought to remember I am under Cousin John's ban.' He stopped, raised his hat, and let her go on, which she did hastily, her composure not increased by his observations. Was it not inconsiderate and impertinent of him to talk of being under 'Cousin John's ban'? It implied consciousness of his (John's) jealousy. Yet how kind and sweet his manner was when he spoke of her being startled. Ah! would it ever be her lot to have a right to such gentle discriminating kindness? And telling herself she was a goose, and a weak sentimentalist, she walked rapidly to Mrs Berry's door, which was opened for her by that excellent person.

'I am sure I am thankful you have come. He has been here these twenty minutes. Now there's nothing ails him but jealousy. Law, Maggie, you are not such a fool as to give half an eye to that Trafford? I declare your cousin has near persuaded me that there is something between you.'

'Mrs Berry,' cried Maggie in despair, 'if you, who know all about us both so well, can believe such nonsense, what shall I do? Pray believe me, I have not spoken twice alone to Mr Trafford since we met in Paris. It is cruel, it is injurious, to believe such outrageous nonsense.'

'Well, there, I don't,' said Mrs Berry. 'Now you go and talk to him; and mind my words, Margaret Grey, don't you go turning up your nose at another good offer, for it's a chance if you will get a third.'

'Do come with me, will you not?'

'Not I; it's small thanks your cousin would give me.'

'Well, come in soon, dear Mrs Berry.'

Cousin John was standing in his favourite position, with his back to the fireless grate.

'Good morning, John,' said Maggie kindly, and as brightly as she could.

'Well, you are tolerably up to time, or I should have come to look for you; and now I hope you are in a good reasonable temper.'

'Of course I am, I always am,' she replied gaily, while something of her last night's tremor came back upon her, for John looked wrathful and resolute.

'I don't pretend to know rightly what you are, Maggie, and for my life I can't believe that you hav'n't some plot in your head. However, I am so fond of you that I do not like to give you up

though perhaps you do not deserve it. Anyhow I am determined to give you another chance. Now I am going back to Algoa Bay in three weeks from this, and I have not committed myself *yet* to Polly Banks. Once for all, will you come with me?'

'I would do anything else in the world for you but this. It would be wrong. I cannot feel for you as a wife ought. You cannot think how it grieves me to say so, but is it not a misfortune to me too?'

'Well, it's past my understanding!' said John, biting his nails wickedly. 'Why you that used to be so fond of me when I was a great lumbering boy, can't put up with me now I am'——

The words, 'a fine young man' were nearly spoken, and had they got into existence John would have stuck gallantly to them; nevertheless he managed to alter them into 'a full-grown man.'

'And I *am* fond of you, dear John, only not just the way you want. One of these days, when you are happy with a wife that dotes on you, you will be quite glad you did not marry me.'

'Will I? But it's not that altogether, little Mag,' said John with more softness than usual. 'I don't seem as if I could leave you alone here to fight your own way. When I am married I'll have my family to look after, and if I have anything to spare it must be for the poor old governor. I tell you, after *this* you will come last. Now, if you marry me—why then I have a wife, and you are provided for. It is such wrong-headed folly to go against me—and I am so fond of you, Mag. I did not know how fond I was of you! How is it that I didn't change, as you have? Many and many's the night I have gone to sleep thinking of you, and longing to see you—and when I did, I liked you better than ever.'

The tone of this speech, so different from John's ordinary rugged self-asserting orations, shook Maggie's soul. This glimpse of the golden grains fused in with the hard quartz of his nature made her think for just one moment. 'Could I not grow to love him? Could I not find more and more gold in his nature?' But his next words dispelled the idea, and she took refuge in that last resource of weakness, a flood of tears.

'What's the use of crying about it? You never would be so dead set against me if you did not think of some one else—a finer match perhaps. But don't you be too sure. You see it's not every one that's ready to marry a girl like you—without anything—though you are such a nice little thing—and yet no beauty either. Come,

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

mad as to interfere with Mr Trafford. Miss Grantham would think—there, I'd better not say what she would think; and Maggie would be sent packing without warning or character. I am not taking Maggie's part—she is a foolish, unsatisfactory girl, as must be left to herself, but you had just better think no more about her.'

John thought moodily for a minute or two, and then, looking at his watch, said, 'You're about right. I'll be off. Good-bye to you, Miss Maggie. When you see me again, I'll be another woman's property,' and taking up his hat, John turned to leave the house.

'What! without shaking hands—without a kind word?' cried Maggie, interposing between him at the door. 'I cannot let you go like that,' and to John's surprise she threw her arms round him for a moment. 'God bless you, and send you good fortune, dear cousin!' then letting him go, she ran into a corner of the room to hide and stifle her tears.

John trusted himself with no backward glances, but marched off steadily, without 'Never so much, as good morning to me,' as Mrs Berry observed. 'Just like all those men, when they have had their turn.'

'Well, I'd like to know how long you are going to take on and cry, Maggie?—making your eyes like boiled gooseberries, and yourself not fit to be seen. Here, Susan shall give you some cold water in the kitchen, and you bathe your face, and try and look Christian-like before you go back. I can tell you, Miss Grantham puts up with more than I would, though I was always fond of you, Maggie, and am; and that's the reason I am out of all patience with you—a saint couldn't stand you. Afraid of meeting John? Well, you needn't. He'll be having a chop and something 'ot before he starts; and I hope they'll give it him 'ot and strong, poor fellow! A man was never so much in love yet that a bite and a drop would not comfort him! Don't want to meet any one? Well, slip out through the garden and up by the crags, and you can get in the back way. Now cheer up. Who knows but the right man will come at last?'

Miss Grantham was engaged with Lord Torchester and Miss Stamer when Maggie reached the house, so she had ample time to recover herself before she was obliged to join them at luncheon. There was an unusually large circle, for besides Miss Stamer and Lord Torchester, Colonel Molyneux, Mr Trafford, and Sir Hugh

Erskine had dropped in. Maggie, therefore, thought herself safe from observation, as no one seemed to take any notice of her. She heard of various projects. Drives and rides. She listened vaguely, then suddenly she heard Sir Hugh Erskine say, 'And you are quite determined to undertake such a journey—to leave England and all its attractions? Why, it will take you a couple of years.'

'I do not see that there is anything to keep me anywhere,' said Trafford easily, 'and I like movement.'

'Why don't you go up in a balloon?' asked the Earl.

'He will be weeping, like Alexander, for more worlds to explore,' cried Miss Grantham. 'Come, Mary, we have scarcely time to dress and walk to the top of the Head. Tor, you must really send for your horses—there is nothing tolerable in the way of scenery within a walk.'

Maggie followed Miss Grantham into her room, who asked, 'Will you not come with us?'

'I would rather not—that is, if you do not want me.'

'No, no. You had better stay at home; you look ill and fretted. You have had a stormy meeting with your cousin?'

'Yes; but he is gone.'

'*Tant mieux.* I think cousins are born to be the plague of one's life! Do you know what Geoff Trafford's new plan is? To travel from Constantinople through Persia, over some part of the Himalayas, into Peshawur. He'll not do it—no one ever did. He will die on the road. But he shan't go. No, not an inch! Did you hear the cool, provoking wretch, at luncheon just now, say there was nothing to keep him in England? Absolutely telling Sir Hugh that the game was in his hand! I will vex them both before the day is over. Maggie—I think you fancy he would not like me to marry Sir Hugh—could you not manage to confide to Geoffrey your fear that I intended doing so?'

'But you would not think of such a thing?'

'I do not know. I sometimes feel as if I could do anything—anything to startle Geoffrey out of his quiet, indifferent, reasonable kindness! There, it is three o'clock; I must go.' But after leaving the room, Miss Grantham suddenly returned, and putting her head in at the door, said abruptly and authoritatively, 'You had better not say anything to Mr Trafford; have nothing to say to him!'

'I certainly shall not, if I can possibly help it,' thought Maggie,

with what she considered strong resolution. More and more she felt what dangerous ground it was where they trod together; for, however unattractive Cousin John might consider her to men in general, Mr Trafford had thought her worth forfeiting some engagement which ought to have been more congenial—and that only to do her a kindness, and enjoy a little quiet conversation, for she knew there was no approach to love-making. Alas! that he should have talked thoughtlessly of that, to her, sacred passage! Never could she think of him again, or trust him in the way she once did. And yet, strange and improbable as it seemed, Mr Trafford did think about her, and understand her; perhaps he would love her were she in his own station, but as she was not, was wisely resisting such folly; and not by the smallest display of her own feelings would she weaken him. Yet he need not have mentioned that one little imprudence which she had most unconsciously committed. And then she argued back through the whole circle, this time arriving at the conclusion that she was the most conceited little idiot in existence, to imagine such a man would give her a serious thought; and so, for the fiftieth time, she determined to think no more of him.

That Cousin John had gone away in a rage was trouble enough, without tormenting herself about a stranger, who had in some mysterious manner got mixed up in her humble life. She was now, indeed, alone, but for her sincere affection for Miss Grantham; and even as regarded her there was a tinge of apprehension, as a sort of shadow dimply shaping evil.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

'TORCHESTER,' said Miss Grantham one wet morning a few days after the concert, as the Earl was grumbling at the weather, Miss Stamer embroidering a smoking cap, and the heiress herself pretending to touch up a sketch. 'Torchester, is Geoff really going to these unpronounceable places?'

'I suppose he is. He is gone up to town to-day about some of his preparations.'

'Gone up to town! Why he never said a word about it last night!'

'Oh, he is coming back to-morrow; he is going to bring his horses with him. He wants to explore the country.'

'Don't you think it is utter madness, his rushing about in this way?'

'Yes, it is a pity; but there is no use in talking about it. After all, a man has a right to please himself; but I shall miss him the worst of any of you. Though I believe he treats me rather as an unlicked cub, I can't help being fond of Geoff.'

'Oh, Lord Torchester! how can you say such things!'

'It's the truth. Fact is, the older I grow the better I can stand his patronage.'

'In short, your heart's in the right place, Tor, wherever your head may be,' said Miss Grantham.

'Which means I am a good-natured simpleton.'

'No, no,' she returned, laughing; 'you have grown awfully knowing of late.'

'That is, since I have learned how to fall in and out of love.'

'How long have you known the art?' asked Miss Grantham, looking sideways to see the effect of some touches on her drawing.

'I have had two bad attacks since I came of age; one was suddenly and completely cured by the obduracy of the object.'

At this Miss Stamer raised her eyes with a look of utter surprise and unbelief, beautiful to behold.

'Mary evidently doubts that fate could permit such things to be,' said Miss Grantham, laughing.

'How can you say such things, dear Margaret?'

'But pray continue your confessions, Tor. What stage are you in now?'

'Regaining strength and reason rapidly; and, for a complete cure, have serious thoughts of trying change of air under Geoff's charge.'

'Now I am quite sure you will do nothing of the kind. You are intended by nature for a pillar of the state to uphold the family credit at Mount Trafford, and Conservative principles in the House, to be solidly useful, and be the pride of your mother's existence.'

'Instead of singing an adorable second, cruising about in a theatrical yachting costume, cultivating fascinations, and working hard for high honours as a critic of beauty, form, colour, and all the rest!'

'Now, Torchester, that's too unblushing an attack on poor Sir Hugh, who is very nice and pleasant.'

'Nice,' repeated the Earl. 'What a queer feminine word nice is. Fancy a fellow like Erskine—who thinks himself a mixture of Adonis and Apollo—or what's his name, Bulwer's heroes all in one, being called nice, like a pigeon pie or a new bonnet. I do not think he would like it.'

'Do you think I would wear a bonnet that deserved no better praise than "nice"? Far from it, my lord. It must be *ravissante*, delicious. But you are really too bad, and to talk of going away when Sir Hugh has promised to bring his yacht round next week and we intend to wind up our sojourn with a cruise somewhere.'

'I hope it will be weather permitting. *This* would be a pleasant day at sea.'

'Oh, of course! Are you going, Mary?' for Miss Stamer rose from her seat.

'Yes, it looks a little lighter, and I promised mamma to be back at three.'

'I will see you to-morrow before we go to the Duchess's dinner. I imagine it will be very slow.'

'Good-bye, then.'

Miss Grantham resumed her drawing, and Lord Torchester looked out of the window.

'Torchester,' she said at length, 'you are not going to follow Geoffrey's bad example, and become a wanderer on the face of the earth?'

'Not quite; but I do think of accompanying him part of the way. You see I don't care much for society, that is, dancing and singing and attitudinising. If I begin to settle down in London and Mount Trafford I will never move, and I want to see a little more of the world first.'

'I can understand that,' said Miss Grantham, putting away her drawing and coming round to the fire; 'but what am I to do when you are both gone? Why Geoff is like—well, my uncle—and you are like my brother. I shall be quite deserted by my male relatives, and I shall make some frightful *mésalliance* in your absence.'

'You will do as you like on that score, whether we are absent or not; and as to relationship, you may consider Geoff what you choose; but I am not like a brother to you, and never could be, which you know right well.'

'Nonsense, Tor!' said Miss Grantham, with a sweet low laugh, she always liked being made love to, and her cousin's earnest sledge-hammer style amused her. 'Don't talk in that way, it is uncomfortable. But I really cannot spare you; you know I am very fond of you.'

'You may be in your own way, but that does not suit me.'

'Well, perhaps your way does not suit me!'

'Perhaps so; then there is no use wasting words, and I had better go.'

'Where? To your hotel? or the Himalayas? No, don't go, dear cousin,' and she laid her hand on his arm with a smile so arch and sweet that had he been less earnest, would have been irresistible. 'It is pleasant to quarrel sometimes.'

'Margaret! you have no conscience! You do not care a straw about me, yet you would like to keep me in your train. But if you think I am going to waste my life in that way, you are very much mistaken. I wish you did not think yourself such a genius. You have cleverness enough for two women, I believe; but you do not see too clearly for all that, and you are such a fine warm-hearted creature that I shall be confoundedly cut up if you marry a scamp, or—any one. No, I'll not stay any longer; for I will not make a fool of myself—which would just please you.' And seizing his hat, the Earl stalked away.

'Now any one else would at least have kissed my hand,' said Miss Grantham to herself with a smile, looking after him. 'He is wonderfully improved! I did not think there was so much "go" in him. "He will not make a fool of himself." That's a tolerably exalted resolution. I wonder if he will keep it. I must tell Maggie Grey of Tor's outbreak.'

Easter was now close at hand. Miss Grantham talked of spending it at the Longmore's, leaving Maggie in town, and our young friend was not unwilling to leave Eastnor, although a few bright warm days had lent it much beauty. Sir Hugh Erskine had reappeared with his yacht, and Maggie was left more than ever to her own and Lady Dormer's society. Although Miss Grantham always showed the utmost confidence in and reliance upon her, yet she could not display the same flattering adoration which the Miss Stamers constantly offered up, and her company could therefore be more easily dispensed with.

John Grey had made no sign, but one morning, about ten days

after his disappearance, Maggie was honoured by an epistle from Aunt Grey herself, detailing the impending marriage of John and Miss Banks, just a week before they were to sail for the Cape, and setting forth the advantages of the marriage, the satisfaction it was to Mr Grey, the pleasant family connection, &c., &c., concluding with wishes that Maggie would be at the wedding, which was to be very quiet, only Bell and Jemima going up to it.'

'Well, that is finished,' thought Maggie. 'Cousin John will tease me no more, and I have lost him.'

She immediately wrote a long congratulatory letter in reply, not mentioning John's unexpected appearance at Eastnor, and when it was despatched she felt as if one chapter in the story of her life was ended.

Miss Grantham was at home that evening, which meant that all the *habitués* of the house were there also. Maggie had been playing for Miss Grantham and Sir Hugh Erskine, and was talking aside to the heiress, who had said in a low voice, 'Do you know Geoffrey Trafford is come back? Cécile saw him as she was working in my bed-room window. I am so glad she warned me. I shall be as stiff and cool as possible. I suppose he will be here presently with Torchester; perhaps he has come to carry him off.'

'I think, from what you described to me the other day, it will not be so easy to carry him off'——

'Lord Torchester and Mr Trafford,' announced a footman.

Miss Grantham swept away, and Maggie took refuge with Miss Stamer, a plain, good-humoured, kindly girl, not much noticed by any one. The evening was almost over before Trafford made his way to them, and then, after a few words of salutation, he said, 'We have been discussing black eyes and their rarity. Do you know that a true black eye is very seldom seen?'

'Why, I know numbers of black-eyed people. There is Sir Hugh Erskine, and—and yourself, Mr Trafford,' said Miss Stamer.

'I deny that Erskine's eyes are black.'

'Only in expression,' said Maggie.

'Isn't that horribly satirical, Mr Trafford? Now, don't you think Mr Trafford's eyes are black?'

'They are not black,' said Maggie, quietly, without looking up from a tangled mass of crochet, which, as was not unusual, she was putting in order for Lady Dormer.

'The most really black eyes I ever saw,' resumed Trafford, 'are

Madame de Beaumanoir's. Did you happen to see her when she was at Southam, Miss Grey?' he added, carelessly.

'I did, indeed, and shall not soon forget her eyes; for she flashed such a look upon me that, only I knew my insignificance was my safe-guard, I should have trembled for my life. I wonder why she looked at me in so strange a manner! Perhaps it was my imagination, for she was very agreeable afterwards.' When she paused, Maggie looked up, and found Trafford's eyes were upon her with fixed attention and some curiosity.

'And you found her improve on acquaintance?'

'I only saw her once—the day before she left—when Miss Grantham drove her back to Southam.'

Trafford made no reply for a moment, and then said, 'Yes; she could be very agreeable. Well, good night, Miss Stamer. I shall tell Erskine you consider him a happy example of black eyes, and Miss Grey's heresies I shall keep to myself. You do not know, perhaps, that she is a Red Republican, cleverly disguised?'

Maggie laughed, and Miss Stamer exclaimed, 'No! really?' as Trafford left them. 'One never knows whether Mr Trafford is in jest or earnest,' added Miss Stamer.

It was a clear moonlight night, and warm for the early season. 'Let us have a cigar here before we turn in,' said the Earl, as they came out on the broad walk in front of the sea. Trafford assented, and after a short silence the Earl began to detail his grievances. He was so annoyed and 'riled' by Margaret Grantham's conduct. She was so flighty, so imprudent—'encouraging that fellow Erskine, who is a thorough scamp!' Would Geoffrey speak to her—advise her?

'No. It would only make matters worse. Margaret must have her head. It seems risky, but I think she will pull through and come right. You see her instincts are all sound; and then Miss Grey, of whom she is very fond, is dead against Sir Hugh. She is not without her influence on Margaret.'

'I think I would rather shoot that fellow than let him marry her.'

'I should not hesitate for a moment, had I the choice,' said Trafford calmly. 'But, Torchester, it strikes me that your anxiety on the subject shows you are not averse to your mother's views; in short, that you are considerably smitten with our fair cousin.'

'I am—that is, I am not an idiot, as I was about little Maggie Grey. I seem to have lived years since that; but it would be so

suitable and satisfactory, and we should be settled and at rest; but she does not care a rap about me. And yet she has a way of keeping you on. Now, do you think she would have put me straight as Miss Grey did, if she had been in her place? Not she! She would have torn me to pieces with her vagaries.'

'I do not think Margaret would marry any one merely for rank or riches; but she is a widely different character,' said Trafford. 'Don't you find it rather queer being so often with your old and your new love?'

'Not a bit,' said the Earl stoutly. 'Miss Grey is such a straightforward little brick, that I never fear her letting out anything, or even thinking anything uncomfortable. I made rather a mistake, and she had more sense than to fall into it. I shall always be her friend; but she is a nice sweet girl—of course, not comparable to a splendid high-bred creature like Margaret; and I hope I shall see her with a good husband yet.' A long pause. 'Do you think I had better give up and be off?' said the Earl at length. 'What would you advise?'

'Patience and perseverance. Do not seem eager, but do not be discouraged. It is a prize worth waiting for.'

'Do you think I have any chance?'

'Could not possibly say. I wish you luck.'

'Do you know, Geoff, I have sometimes thought she was fond of you?'

'Pooh—nonsense! She would like to victimise me, like every one else—that's all.'

'Well, I will go in,' said the Earl. 'Good night.'

Trafford lit another cigar, and strolled up and down in deep thought. 'Tastes differ,' he meditated. 'I prefer a violet to a magnolia.' On the whole he felt better pleased than he had been for some time; he fancied he had got the clue to the mysterious coldness in Maggie's manner, which he could not help attributing to Madame de Beaumanoir. There had been mischief in that woman's eyes too, when he had seen her in London—mischief he could understand—and on this he had pondered deeply; but how could he ascertain what she had said or done? He dared not broach the subject to Miss Grantham; it would rouse her suspicions, and make a trifle of too much importance; and then to approach it with Maggie would be dangerous—delicious, but distressing to her. And yet he would not, and could not, lie under the suspicion of having breathed a word, a whisper, that could in-

jure her, or even seem to treat lightly that which he wished her to feel was a sweet and sacred recollection; but now that he had discovered she had met that infernal mischief-making woman, one part of the way was clear, and he would not quit Eastnor till Maggie fully understood that he was as true as herself. 'and that is saying a good deal,' thought Trafford, puffing his cigar rather energetically. 'True, and sweet and bright, and yet I am kept back from striving to win what I long for, as I never longed before, by a mere phantom obstacle! Is this wisdom, or is it folly?'

Two days after there was a grand entertainment given by Mrs McGrabbit, the resident social head of Eastnor, who was resolved not to let slip such a golden opportunity of receiving real *bonâ fide* grandees at her house. She had carefully improved the splendid opening offered by the concert, and was rewarded, for her invitations were generally accepted by the brilliant company 'now enlivening our charming little town with their presence,' as the *Eastnor Chronicle and East Sussex Register* remarked.

Mr Trafford however was away. He had ridden the previous day across the country, to dine and sleep at a bachelor friend's house in Kent, and was not expected to return till the day after.

Miss Grantham had departed, and Lady Dormer sat down to a quiet game of backgammon with Maggie. Her ladyship had won two hits, and was quite lively and wide awake.

'I think I am in luck to-night,' she said. 'Shall we try another?'

'By all means, Lady Dormer.'

So they recommenced. Lady Dormer was pondering deeply how she should manage an awkward treize ace without leaving a man uncovered, when, to their great surprise, Mr Trafford was announced.

'I had no idea you would return to-day,' said Lady Dormer, holding out one hand, but still grasping the dice-box in the other. 'Margaret is gone, and you are rather late.'

'I do not intend joining the party, if you will allow me to stay here. I found my host was going to town to-day, so I was obliged to leave. Do not let me disturb your game. You have the evening papers; I will look at them.'

Trafford drew a low easy-chair to the table and took up a paper. Lady Dormer and Maggie resumed their game, and Trafford occasionally offered advice impartially or imparted scraps of news. At length Lady Dormer brought the game to a triumphant conclusion

'There is no use in contending with you to-night, Lady Dormer, said Maggie, smiling. 'I feel disheartened.'

'*Du courage,*' said Trafford. '*Heureux au jeu, malheureux en amour*—which is the most important game. Come, Lady Dormer, rest upon your laurels. There is a very interesting article on the prospects of the French Empire. I will read it to you if you like.'

'I am sure you are very good, Mr Trafford. I shall be delighted.'

Lady Dormer settled herself in her chair, Maggie noiselessly removed the backgammon-board and the small table that held it, and Trafford began. It was a long, dry, rambling disquisition on the resources and racial tendencies of the French, and in spite of his pleasant expressive voice, Trafford managed to read monotonously.

Maggie, much surprised at his unusual readiness to entertain Lady Dormer, placed herself near the lamp at the centre table, took up her piece of drawing-room work, and sat a few minutes listening and thinking. Presently Mr Trafford ceased reading, and laid down the paper. Maggie looked up quickly. Lady Dormer lay back as far as her chair would let her, sound asleep; and as Trafford's eyes met hers, Maggie, vexed though she had been, could not suppress a quick, amused smile.

'Comfortable, is she not?' said Trafford.

'Very, and deeply interested.'

Trafford drew his chair forward a little, and putting his elbow on the table, rested his head on his hand. There was a moment's silence, which, in spite of her mental effort for profound composure, made Maggie desperately nervous.

'Have you not finished that piece of work yet, Miss Grey?'

He remembered then that she used to work point lace in Paris.

'It is another piece.'

'I think you told me I was to have the first-fruits of that needle-case, but I have not seen them yet.'

'No; I could not begin the purse, or cap, or whatever it was to be, at the time—and then'——a pause.

'You began to think me undeserving?'

This was so exactly the truth that Maggie coloured, hesitated, and then attempted to excuse herself.

'Of course I ought'——

'Pray do not try any prevarications; they will not come readily to *you*. Your face tells me that I have hit on the truth.'

'It is desperately hard to be quite true,' said Maggie, 'and yet it is absolutely stupid to be anything else.'

She spoke for the sake of speaking, feeling that Trafford was looking at her, to avoid an embarrassed silence.

Trafford threw a quick glance at Lady Dormer—she was fast—and then said, rather abruptly:

'So you thought the charming Marquise de Beaumanoir looked as if she could consign you to death?'

'I certainly did.'

'She did not like you.'

'Not like me? I was an utter stranger to her. It is impossible!'

Trafford himself felt very anxious to plunge into his explanation, yet nearly dreaded it.

'You see I happened to be engaged to dine with her one day in Paris, and that very day I found a young lady, in whom I took some interest, locked out and absolutely without any retreat; so—you perhaps remember the circumstance?'

'I do indeed.'

She looked full and fearlessly at him, too eager in her desire for further information to think of embarrassment.

'Well,' resumed Trafford, 'we drove in the Bois de Boulogne, and I somehow forgot my engagement; but the next day, when I went to make my apology, Madame was not to be appeased. She too, unfortunately, had been driving in the Bois and recognised me, therefore considered herself ill-used because I had preferred a drive with you to a dinner with her.' He paused.

'But is it possible that one passing glance could so fix a face in her memory?—that so slight an affront could remain in it?' cried Maggie, now blushing vividly over her little ears and even the slender white throat, as she tried, with tremulous hands, to proceed with her work.

'Madame de Beaumanoir is not a character you would readily understand,' said Trafford, watching with an uneasy yet delicious sense of gratification, these signs of disturbance. 'She has a wonderful memory, a keen sense of what is due to herself, and a somewhat uncharitable way of judging, and attributing motives. I rather hoped you would not have met.'

Maggie's heart was beating fast: the whole circumstances of Madame de Beaumanoir's visit flashed back upon her with astonishing clearness. 'Say no more,' said she, quickly, in a low voice;

'I understand it all now.' And then, though her eyes were rivetted on her work, a smile—a happy, contented smile—stole round her lips and dimpled the cheek next to Trafford so sweetly, that he felt desperately inclined to kiss it at any risk; but he wisely refrained, and broke the delightful expressive silence by saying, 'Will you make me the first-fruits, then?'

'I will.' And Trafford knew he had been doubted, distrusted, and forgiven, or rather reinstated.

'I should like so much to ask you some questions,' said Trafford. 'May I?'

'No; you can imagine everything.'

'That infer——I mean that fascinating French-woman did not succeed in doing mischief?'

'Not much; the material she had to work upon was too fine and pure not to detect and reject poison.'

Trafford did not reply, for Maggie, now roused up and glowing, was for a few minutes above tremors and timidity.

'What possible wrong could there be in two civilized people taking a drive together?' she asked, indignantly. 'What strange heads and hearts those must have who would make harm out of it!'

Then her fiery courage collapsed, and she would have given a good deal to recall the words. It was strange that Mr Trafford should have broken an engagement with a great, grand, beautiful lady, to drive with a simple girl like herself. Right or wrong, it was a triumph dear to her woman's heart.

'Your own instinct was your best guide,' said Trafford.

'Do not let us talk any more about it,' said Maggie, half impatiently, half imploringly.

'Very well; but I cannot help remembering our ramble by the lake as—well, as very pleasant.'

'Are you going to—to that place with the queer name?' said Maggie, hastily, to change the subject.

'I have not the least idea what I am going to do.'

'What despair poor Mr Bolton will be in! I am sure you will kill him at last.'

'By the way, Bolton sent his compliments, or his best regards to you, Miss Grey, on two occasions when I saw him, and I have always forgotten to deliver them. I should not be surprised if he adopted you, you are a great favourite.'

'I am very glad. It is so nice to be liked.'

Maggie was feeling more composed and at ease. It was wonder-

fully like those delightful evenings in Paris, when Mrs Berry was at Fontainebleau. Good heavens! if Miss Grantham knew that!

'And you are very fond of Miss Grantham—she is kind?'

'Oh! the dearest—the most generous friend. I am wonderfully fortunate in meeting with her! I was very desolate when I returned to England.'

'As bad as when first you joined Aunt Grey?' said Trafford, with his softest tone and caressing smile, showing he had forgotten none of her simple confidences.

'Oh no! I had learned more. I had more faith in myself. It is a great thing to try even to stand alone, and I begin to think—though it is not very firmly—I can.'

'And what have you done with your Cousin John? I hope you mollified him. You were in an awful fright the other morning, going up for punishment!'

'Oh!' said Maggie, breaking into such a bright smile that she sparkled all over. 'He is quite well, and is to be married on the 29th.'

'Good heavens!' cried Trafford, 'it is perfectly incredible!'

'Yes. Is it not cheering to think of him and Lord Torchester—their rapid and complete cure? Theirs cannot be such a terrible malady after all.'

Relieved, and even revived by this explanation and pleasant talk with Trafford, Maggie laughed aloud in the gaiety of her heart.

Lady Dormer probably had had her sleep, for Maggie's laugh was not loud, yet her ladyship woke up suddenly, as Trafford exclaimed, 'Both are inexplicable to me,' and said sleepily, 'Eh? what is it?'

Whereupon Trafford said he had not liked to disturb her, but must now say good-night.

'You will not forget your promise this time?' said he, expressively, as he took leave of Maggie. 'Little witch! thinks she can stand alone. Well, perhaps so. What a charming mixture pluck and softness make!' was his last thought that night.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ALTHOUGH Maggie was infinitely pleased and relieved by ascertaining the true channel through which Miss Grantham had heard of her drive with Mr Trafford, she was resolved to be more cautious than ever. No doubt the worst had been made of Madame de Beaumanoir's rencontre, and she was wonderfully fortunate in retaining Miss Grantham's friendship in spite of such representations; but she could not hide from herself that, however kind and trustful, Miss Grantham was not at ease when there was the least approach to private communication between Trafford and herself.

And on her own account it was better to avoid him. If he was trying to resist a tenderness for herself—and the feeling that he was grew upon her—it was her pride to help him. In short, loving both, ought she not to wish for, nay, so far as lay in her humble power, strive to promote, his marriage with Miss Grantham? This would be reasonable; but she could not be reasonable on this subject. So far from wishing for such a union, the very idea of it seemed to press upon her heart with an icy weight like death itself.

However, Trafford did not give her much trouble. He did not seek her nor Miss Grantham, but went and came between London and Eastnor in an unsettled way that naturally disposed the heiress to think he could neither make up his mind to leave her nor to propose for her.

Still Maggie was happier and more settled since her conversation with Trafford; she even began to think a little more of her own future; she wished much to have a busier life, where absence and occupation would cure her of the preposterous attachment she had allowed to grow up from a seemingly harmless grain of sympathy and liking till it overshadowed her whole being, and all the winged fancies of her brain and heart lodged in the branches of it.

When they returned to London she would speak to Miss Grantham. How she wished she had some wise experienced friend with whom to take counsel—she was so inexperienced herself.

And now the Eastnor season was nearly finished. Lady Brockhurst talked of going to Paris. The Duchess was going for a short visit to 'dear Lady Torchester.' Miss Grantham's house in town

was quite ready, but each day the quiet sociable little place was prettier and pleasanter.

'Well, Torchester, I thought you had absolutely started for Thibet or Tartary, it is so long since you have been down here,' said Miss Grantham, when the Earl joined them rather unexpectedly as luncheon was nearly over one morning. 'And what is the matter? You look awfully solemn.'

'Where's Geoff Trafford?' replied the Earl. 'I thought I should find him here—he is not at the hotel.'

'We have not seen him to-day. Is anything wrong, Torchester?'

'Well, I am afraid Garret and Oldham are going to smash.'

'And what then?—they are something in the City, are they not?'

'Yes; and I believe Geoffrey has every rap he is possessed of in the concern.'

'And will he lose all his money?' asked Miss Grantham.

'I am very much afraid he will'

'Good heavens, Tor! and have none left?'

'I suspect so.'

'What on earth will he do?'

'I can't tell; but I know I am a good deal cut up about it. They say Bolton drew him into the concern, and has every *sou* of his own in it. I feel very much annoyed with Bolton.'

'But where can Geoffrey be?—Johnson, send over to the hotel, and ask if they know where Mr Trafford is. As to being annoyed with Mr Bolton that is nonsense; he believed in these horrid people, and gave them his own money.'

'How exceedingly imprudent!' said Lady Dormer. 'Not what I should have expected from Mr Bolton—to give his money to any one.'

'I never knew anything half so dreadful,' exclaimed Miss Grantham. 'Are you sure he will lose everything?'

'If they smash it is more than likely, and fellows who understand these things said at the club last night that they could not hold out over to-day.'

'And what is to be done?'

'There is nothing to be done, as regards the bank, but we must make Hillshire and Lord B—— get Geoffrey some good appointment somewhere.'

'And banish him out of the country, I suppose?'

'People have to work so deuced hard in it.'

Here Johnson returned with the information that Mr Trafford had gone out boating, and they had no idea when he would return.

'How provoking! What a shock it will be to him, poor fellow!'

'I don't know about that,' said the Earl. 'He has been going to the City lately a good deal. You see he isn't given to talking about his own affairs, and there would have been no use trying to sell, for the shares have been going down. I fancy it's a fear of this business that has kept him in England.'

'Oh,' said Miss Grantham, in what sounded a very peculiar tone. 'Well, Torchester, I am going to ride—or I was going—but I do not feel as if I could do anything. Where are the papers? Is there nothing in them?' Maggie rose and went swiftly for the 'Times,' but the 'money article' was well nigh unintelligible to the inexperienced readers, and when the Earl attempted to expound its mysteries he was speedily ordered not to make 'confusion worse confounded.'

'I have heard my Cousin John say,' observed Maggie timidly, 'that the bank-rate is a sort of index to the state of City affairs, and you see it has been raised again yesterday.'

'Is that bad?' asked Miss Grantham.

'Yes, very bad; and it says "scarcely any sales effected on the Stock exchange, owing to the general distrust."'

'In short, we are on the eve of a panic,' said the Earl.

'Well, don't go away, Tor,' said Miss Grantham. 'Be sure you come to dinner, and bring Geoffrey with you. How strange that he should go out boating if he expected such news!'

'It would be very sad if anything were to happen to him just now, and boating is always dangerous,' said Lady Dormer, plaintively.

'Aunt Dormer! how can you talk in such a distracting way? Why should any accident happen? Johnson, send over to Lady Brockhurst. My love, I have a headache, and cannot ride to-day.'

'Erskine will be desperately disappointed,' said Lord Torchester.

'He is not here,' returned Miss Grantham.

'Where is he gone to?'

'Oh, I don't know and I don't care.' The Earl opened his eyes.

'Come, Maggie, I want a quiet walk. You will find us somewhere along the beach, Torchester, towards Cray's Creek, if you have any news. We dine at seven.'

'This is very extraordinary,' said Miss Grantham, when she

found herself alone with Maggie. 'Do you think it was fear of this break or loss that kept him—I mean Geoffrey—in England?'

'I cannot tell, dear Miss Grantham.'

'But what do you think?—what do you imagine?'

'If he had any idea of such a misfortune, of course he would not leave England, but I never thought he seriously intended it.'

'Indeed! I wonder what he will do. Something quite different from what every one would expect. I wonder what will come of it all. You know one can show more of real feeling when a person is in trouble than at any other time, and—don't you think so?' interrupting herself abruptly.

'Certainly; it is *then* that true affection will show itself.'

'Yes.' A long pause. 'Maggie, I show great confidence in you by asking, do you—do you think Geoffrey cares for me—loves me? Tell me your real impression.'

'I have no clear impression about it. I cannot imagine him indifferent to you, but I cannot quite see that he is in love. However, if Mr Trafford chooses to keep it to himself *I* should never find it out.'

'Nor I either,' put in Miss Grantham. 'Yet I must find it out, and this is an opportunity. It will require wonderful courage, but I may be able to save both of us much suffering.'

'What do you think of doing?' said Maggie in a low tone, feeling herself pale and cold.

'Only going to try an experiment, and if the result is favourable I will tell you more,' returned Miss Grantham, trying to laugh. 'Ah, Maggie, I believe you are a true honest friend, yet the strangest doubts about you cross me sometimes.'

'Doubt anything you like except my sincerity and gratitude towards yourself,' said Maggie, with much earnestness. 'What have I ever done to rouse your suspicions?

'Nothing, nothing. I hardly know what I mean myself. Let us turn and go back again. I wonder if Geoffrey has returned?'

He had not, nor had he when Lord Torchester came in to dinner. 'How strange! I never knew him stay out so long,' and Miss Grantham sat through the dinner in a state of nervous expectation.

Meantime Maggie had asked permission to spend the evening with her friend Mrs Berry, feeling that she would be *de trop* in the family council, and Miss Grantham granted it with a smile and nod that showed appreciation of the motive. It was with a sense of re-

tief that Maggie found herself out alone in the cool fresh air of an early spring evening.

There had been a good deal of wind in the morning, but it had gone down with the sun. Nevertheless the tide was rolling up in foam-crested waves which broke in dull sullen thunder on the beach, bringing with them the delicious savour of life-giving saltness. Maggie, who dearly loved every sight and sound of nature, determined to indulge in a ramble past the fishing village before committing herself to Mrs Berry for the evening, and, deep in a very vague reverie, walked on and on till the failing light warned her to return. Before turning back she paused to look at some men drawing up a large boat on the beach below where she stood. A mast and a heap of wet sail lay across the boat, and the whole looked picturesque in the grey evening, helped by the enchantment of distance. Higher up upon the beach stood a man, a tall man, who seemed by his gestures to be giving directions, and then turning away he walked quickly over the shingle to the road or path which lay at the foot of the low cliffs or crags which there defended the land.

To her joy, her terror, her utter dismay and confusion, Maggie recognised Mr Trafford. Of course he would be returning by the same road, and to avoid him was impossible. She would have given much to find a turn to the right or to the left, but there was none. She felt positively dizzy, and—he was by her side.

'Miss Grey! What extraordinary event has brought you here? Your cousin must have left England by this time?' and Trafford looked down at her with a smile.

'Oh, yes. I was going to have tea with Mrs Berry, but it was so pleasant by the sea I strolled on.'

'Ah! you keep up your relations with our unhappy friend?' said Trafford, walking beside her, evidently bent on escorting her.

'Of course; she was always so kind to me. But, Mr Trafford, you must hasten back, they are so anxious to see you.'

'Why am I always to be despatched in this summary manner? We used to have nice long talks in Paris. You used not to be so anxious to get rid of me here.'

'I know that,' said Maggie, driven to perfect candour in her confusion and anxiety; 'but now everything is quite different, and if you knew how anxious Miss Grantham and Lord Torchester are about you, you would go back at once.'

'Torchester? Is he here? What brought him down? Ah! I see by your face bad news. What is it? Is the bank gone?'

Not exactly, I believe.'

'By Jove, I suppose it is by this time. I suppose the evening papers are in. Well, Miss Grey, I will hasten in. I confess to a large amount of curiosity.'

'Perhaps,' said Maggie, blushing crimson, and feeling indignant with herself, 'perhaps you had better not—I mean—you need not—mention you met me.'

Trafford looked round quickly with a smile, and said, 'No—certainly—there is no Madame de Beaumanoir here. Come, Miss Grey, shake hands, and wish me good luck. Take off your glove,' he added impatiently, as he held out his own hand. Maggie quickly complied, and laying hers frankly in it, raised her sweet kindly eyes, exclaiming, 'I do wish you luck with all my heart.'

Trafford grasped her hand closely, warmly, and half-unconsciously laid the other over it. 'It will make very little difference in time,' he said hastily; 'I shall go with you to Mrs Berry's.'

'For Heaven's sake, no!' cried Maggie, frightened into decision. 'You ought to go to Miss Grantham at once. You must.'

'Well, I will then,' said he, slowly. 'Good-bye, and *au revoir*.'

Trafford turned away, and without trusting himself to look back, walked quickly towards the town, and a bend of the road soon hid him from her sight.

Maggie breathed more freely. She was safe and alone, and in spite of reason and regret for the possible trials impending over him, her soul was filled with exultation; for Trafford was willing to postpone his perusal of the all-important evening papers to walk with her. Yet what folly, to be pleased with such an outrage of *les convenances*, which she knew could lead to no good result!

Mrs Berry had finished tea when Maggie reached the Esplanade Villas. 'My goodness, this is a treat! Why, I thought I was never going to see you again.'

'It is really the first time I have had a chance of going out, dear Mrs Berry.'

'Well, take off your hat, and tell us the news. Do you want any tea?'

'No, thank you.'

'So your cousin's married and gone. You lost a good chance there, Maggie.'

'Perhaps so. I could not help it.'

'Take my advice, and don't let any of those fine gentlemen

make a fool of you. I hear a good bit of gossip one way and another from the Honourable Mrs S. and her maid; and I hear Miss Grantham quite spoils you.'

'She does indeed.'

'But they say she will marry that baronet, and then you will lose her,' &c., &c.

Meantime Trafford had glanced at the evening papers, and found the announcement he expected. 'Garret and Oldham' had suspended payment.

It is a painful sensation, that of being ruined; that between you and destitution there is only the thin plank of your own exertions, all crude and undeveloped as they are in that biggest of all big babies, an untrained gentleman.

I suppose it makes some difference in the stunning total if the ruin is involuntary or self-sought. At any rate, Trafford did not take time to realise it just then. He dressed quickly, and went over to Miss Grantham's house, whence two messages reached him while performing his toilet.

'Oh, Geoffrey! I have been quite miserable about you,' cried Miss Grantham, coming forward with both hands outstretched.

'I say, Geoff! have you seen the papers?' said the Earl.

'I have just seen them, and read their very unpleasant news.'

'Coffee, if you please?' said the butler.

'No, tea, if you have it.'

'Oh, Geoffrey, how can you be so calm?' said Miss Grantham.

'What would you have me to do? Tear my hair? I assure you I feel no small degree of disquiet; but there is no use whatever in tearing myself to pieces to-night. I shall go to town to-morrow, and deliver myself up to the tormentors; so I may as well keep quiet for the present.'

'I will go with you, Geoff,' said the Earl.

'Thanks, Torchester.'

'But, Geoffrey, dear Geoffrey! have you no money at all left?'

'I scarcely know yet. At all events, if I am driven to seek parochial aid, I shall select Castleford Union, and then, Margaret, you can supply me with "baccy," which is one of the luxuries not provided by an ungrateful country.'

'Ah, Geoffrey, you make my heart ache.'

'Then I shall never forgive myself. Why, Torchester, what a trump this princess of ours is! Things will not be so bad, Mar-

[illegible] Marquis [illegible] a [illegible] if you [illegible]

'[illegible] for you, sir,' said the [illegible] Johnson, approaching with one of those appalling yellow envelopes which strike terror even into [illegible]

Trafford opened it and its face darkened. 'This is a bad business,' he said, and handed the telegram to Lord Torchester.

'What is it?' asked Miss Grantham. Lord Torchester with an exclamation of dismay gave it to her, and she read, 'H. Lee Lancaster's Can Fiesta to E. Trafford. Come up at once. Garrett and Dilham gone. Dunin seized with paralysis.'

'Poor old fellow,' said Trafford. 'I suspect he suffers as much on my account as his own.'

'Poor old fellow treasure,' remarked Lady Dormer. 'I wonder where they went to. Poor Lord Torchester always had Dilham. Dilham quite kept him alive.'

Miss Grantham said nothing.

'Never "Dunin!"' said the Earl. 'We must take the first train to-morrow.'

'There's nothing that [illegible] Trafford; 'and the first train is up now, we should scarcely gain half an hour by it. I am [illegible] to stay [illegible] All the money on earth is not worth a drop of pleasure.'

'I am so grieved about Mr Bolton. What misfortunes! Nothing pleasant seems to last,' murmured Miss Grantham in a low voice.

'Oh, this is only a passing cloud,' said Trafford, turning kindly to her. 'Twelve months hence everything will seem quite right again, even to me; long before that, to you. Come, Torchester. I am not very agreeable society to-night, but will you have a smoke and a talk with me?'

'Certainly,' replied the Earl, rising.

'You might just as well talk before me,' said Miss Grantham pouting.

'No, you take things too much to heart;' and Trafford smiled as he held out his hand. 'Good night, and good-bye—at all events for the present.'

'No, no, not good-bye,' said Miss Grantham earnestly. 'I must see you to-morrow. Promise you will not start without seeing me. Do promise, Geoff!' Her colour rose as she spoke, and then left her very pale.

'Certainly, as you wish it. But I fear I must be a very early visitor.'

'Never mind. Come at any hour—ten—nine.'

'At ten, then; so good-night.'

'Are you not going to say good-night to me?' asked the Earl in an injured voice.

'Oh, yes! Pray forgive me, Torchester.'

When they were gone, Miss Grantham rang and inquired if Miss Grey had returned. Receiving a reply in the negative, she desired that she should be sent to her as soon as she came in.

When Maggie knocked at Miss Grantham's door after receiving her message, she entered and found the heiress in a long white dressing-gown, sitting by an open window and looking out upon the sea.

'You wanted me, Miss Grantham?'

'Yes; come and sit down' (in a low, soft tone). 'I have nothing to say, yet I want to speak to a reasonable human being.'

Maggie sat down. 'Are you wise,' she asked, 'to sit at that open window in so thin a dress? The air is quite cold.'

'Yes, I believe I feel chilled,' replied Miss Grantham, rising with a visible shiver and closing the window. 'But I was so lost in thought, I forgot everything.'

Maggie looked closely at her friend, and was grieved to see the paleness of her cheek—the heaviness of her eyes.

'And what news have the evening papers brought you?' she asked timidly.

'Oh, the worst! The bank is gone, and Mr Trafford's money with it.'

'And he—is he dreadfully distressed?'

'Of course. He will not show it; in fact, he took it splendidly. But oh, Maggie, I cannot tell you what I felt to-night when he talked, even in jest, of going into the workhouse! To think of his wanting anything in the world that I have! There has always been such a marvellous charm about Geoffrey for me. There is so much power in his careless ease—in his simple, natural, kindly manners. I ought, I suppose, to be very much ashamed of myself; but I *do* feel that, if he loves me not, chaos is come again. Do not despise me, Maggie; I feel so strange and low, and hot and cold—as if I wanted to put my head somewhere and cry.' And the proud, beautiful, spoiled heiress suddenly knelt down, and clasping her arms round Maggie's slight figure, laid her head upon her

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] Maggie

[illegible]

[illegible] I wonder what he will do?' Maggie took her head in sorrow at her incapability of surmising a reply. 'I suppose he will become a confirmed wanderer,' added Miss Grantham.

'It costs a great deal of money to travel,' said Maggie, thoughtfully.

'There again! poverty hedges him in. Something must be done, Maggie. Mr Trafford promised to see me to-morrow before he goes to town, and I hope to persuade him to hear reason and yield to his friend's wishes to arrange something for him.'

'It will be very difficult to approach the subject.'

'Awfully difficult,' said Miss Grantham, half unconsciously clasping Maggie's hand. 'But I must—I will find the courage to do it.' (A long pause.) 'There is no use sitting here talking any longer; I shall go to bed,' said Miss Grantham. 'And, Maggie, if you would be very good to me, you will read me to sleep.'

'I will indeed, with pleasure.'

'Well, ring for Cécile, and get some poetry I know, that I need not follow closely; "Evangeline" will do.'

But it was long before Maggie could lull her troubled friend to rest; she was feverish and wakeful, with hot, dry hands. Sometimes she dozed, then started up wide awake and palpitating. At last, calling herself thoughtless and selfish, she peremptorily ordered Maggie to bed, where, though weary and worn with a crowd of distressing, troublesome thoughts, she could not sleep till the dawn had come.

Miss Grantham made a semblance of breakfast in her own room, and dressed with unusual care, yet she was much dissatisfied with the result.

'How pale and ill and frightful I look, Cécile.'

'Pas du tout, Mademoiselle! ce n'est qu'une délicatesse tout à fait charmante.'

A knock at the door. 'Mr Trafford wishes to know if Miss Grantham will see him?'

'Yes, of course. Where is Lady Dormer?'

'Miladi has not yet risen.'

'And she takes two hours to dress!'

Miss Grantham cast another dissatisfied glance at the glass, and then went hastily down-stairs.

Trafford was standing by one of the windows when she came in, and, when he turned to meet her, looked so little distressed or cast down that she could not help smiling; while he, on the contrary, was quite struck by the pallor of her cheek.

'Margaret! you cannot be well; and your hand is quite feverish. What is the matter? You have not lost a fortune nor a friend.'

'There is nothing the matter with me, Geoff, except that I am troubled about you.'

'Well, you must put me out of your head. I cannot bear to think that I am a source of discomfort to you. I am by no means in despair myself.'

'I see that.' She sat down, and an awkward silence ensued.

'You wanted to see me; you wanted to speak to me. I am all attention.'

'Yes, Geoffrey' (twisting her hands and showing signs of uneasiness). 'Will it not be a great complication of your difficulties, this attack of Mr Bolton's?'

'It will not simplify matters. But is there anything you want me to do for you?'

[illegible] I should [illegible] like to trouble myself about you have [illegible] to [illegible] you—I want to tell you something [illegible] [illegible] I [illegible].

Will you [illegible] tell me [illegible] Marquise.

Nothing [illegible] this [illegible] very [illegible]. Can you not guess

[illegible] you have [illegible] entangled yourself with Eustace and want me to extricate you. If that is so, I'll pull you through [illegible] [illegible] me.

[illegible] course I would [illegible] you, [illegible] Heaven. I am [illegible] he is [illegible] Eugène [illegible].

[illegible] I am [illegible] you cannot be in debt, and [illegible] [illegible] he is [illegible] [illegible] either from love or money,' said Trafford, [illegible]. 'Have you quarrelled with your Trimester? If so, I am [illegible] you do not want my help to make it up.

'No, of course not. [illegible] Geoffrey, it is partly about money, [illegible] I am afraid of you.

'Afraid of me? [illegible] that is too large a draft on my credulity.' Trafford looked at her warily. He was beginning to feel rather [illegible] at the sight of Miss Grantham's extreme embarrassment.

'No, [illegible] look at you with Geoffrey. What I wanted to say is that if you want money to do anything or go anywhere, you [illegible] not mind——' A sudden break-down.

'In other words, you would like to bestow half your fortune on me?' [illegible] Trafford, smiling. 'I have not the least doubt you would [illegible] in the generous impulse of your heart. But, *ma belle*, such things cannot be in this [illegible] place world.'

'The half, Geoff,' [illegible] Miss Grantham, suddenly walking to the mantelpiece, where she rested her elbow and covered her face with her hand. 'I wish—I wish I could give you the whole.'

Something in her voice, her attitude, her emotion, revealed her full meaning to Trafford, who stood a moment silent, more touched and embarrassed than he would have cared to own, a dark flush passing over his brow; then approaching Miss Grantham, he gently took the hand that hung down by her side. Kissing it with the most loyal respect, he said, in a low voice: 'That would be impossible, unless, indeed, I could give you my heart and life in exchange; and both have passed out of my keeping, or they would have been yours before this. There is my secret, sweet cousin.'

Miss Grantham pressed his hand and drew hers away instantly.

Trafford, not knowing very well what to say or do, turned to leave, when Miss Grantham, without uncovering her face, exclaimed eagerly:

'One word. It is not that odious Madame de Beaumanoir? Any one but her!'

'Madame de Beaumanoir! Most certainly not.'

'Thank God! Now go away, Geoffrey—do go.'

He kissed her hand once more, and when she uncovered her eyes she was alone.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE lady of the house was not visible till luncheon time, and when that repast was over, she desired Maggie to put on her hat, for she had a headache, and felt dull, and wanted a walk.

Maggie obeyed, and joined Miss Grantham, who had succeeded in disembarrassing herself of Miss Stamer.

'Let us go where we shall not meet any one.'

'Then we had better go towards the village,' said Maggie; and there they went, strolling somewhat silently along, till Miss Grantham suddenly declared she felt so weary she could go no farther.

'There is a pleasant seat in an angle of the crag, near the end of Mrs Berry's garden,' said Maggie, 'where you might rest, and still be in the air.'

'Let us go to it, by all means.'

A short steep path led from the end of Mrs Berry's garden, where it opened on a footway, between the esplanade and the village, to a nook in the ambitiously named crag; where, quite sheltered behind and on the right, you could look far out to sea, or down on the fisher village below.

'This is very nice,' said Miss Grantham, sinking down. 'I do not know why it is, but my limbs ache, and I am so weary.' She remained silent a few minutes, soothed by the gentle dash of the waves and the measured rush of their backward sweep.

'Well, Mr Trafford and I had a long talk this morning,' said Miss Grantham at last, with an evident effort. 'He was quite

[illegible] money—would not hear of any one helping him—not, Maggie, I am glad to tell you. I found out he is attached to some one: indeed, engaged. I imagine, from what he said; so pray forget my nonsense. I may have talked about him. I intend to forget it all myself; of course everything is altered now. I should not be such a goose as to give him another thought, except as an old friend; in such matters the wisest may be mistaken—and I could not help fancying that— Oh! there is no use in talking about it; but, Maggie, it is curious you should have warned me against the possibility of his being attached, or entangled, or something. What put it into your head, anything in Paris?'

'Nothing whatever; only that as Mr Trafford is a good deal older than you, and a great traveller, and you had seen nothing of him for some years, such a thing was possible; and the only way to account for his not—' Maggie paused.

'Loving me,' finished Miss Grantham; 'perhaps so, though I am by no means sure. Do not let us talk about him any more; but do not imagine I am ashamed of having loved Geoffrey! He is the truest man I have ever met; the only creature whose presence comforted me, and made me think twice before I talked nonsense. Ah! it is very miserable; but there! I am not going to break my heart about him—let us talk of something else.'

Brave words, which would help to their own fulfilment; but Maggie guessed shrewdly at the bleeding wound they cloaked. Moreover, while bearing her part well in the rather languid conversation, Maggie had her own pangs to stifle: Mr Trafford was probably engaged, and this ought to be nothing to her.

'Well, the day after to-morrow we are to go to town. I am very glad, we shall have such quantities to do. There is my court dress, and indeed a complete change of mourning. I feel quite anxious to leave this; yet the last six weeks have been very pleasant! How I wish I had not to dine with Lady Brockhurst to-night, my head aches fearfully.'

'Don't go,' said Maggie.

'Oh! I must, if it cost my life!' cried Miss Grantham, excitedly. 'Can you not imagine how the graceful little panther would come to-morrow and pet me, and say she knew how it would be when those tiresome men left! and tell me every possible bit of ill-natured scandal about Geoffrey, and his debts and wild doings; no, no! I will go, and be the brightest there. Poor, dear Geoff! I know he could not bear Lady Brockhurst; I am sure he

could not; but we will not talk of him. Come, Maggie, we will go in; perhaps bathing my head with eau-de-cologne and water may relieve it.'

Miss Grantham did manage to dine with Lady Brockhurst that evening; and the next day she was feverishly impatient about their preparations for going to town. Her will was law, and the second morning after Trafford had disappeared from the scene, Maggie found herself *en route* for London, in company with Lady Dormer, two ladies' maids, a pet Skye terrier, and their liege lady, who, Maggie was distressed to see, was alternately flushed and pale, with heavy eyes and hot hands.

Again our simple heroine wondered at and admired the magic of money power. They came from a well-ordered breakfast-table, and found a still more exquisitely appointed dinner awaiting them. One noiseless, ubiquitous functionary, of inexhaustible resources and unerring memory, was left behind to knit up the ravelled débris of their stay into a symmetrical *finis*. And lo! another, slightly different in exterior manifestation, but equally gifted, stood on the threshold of the P—— Square mansion to receive them. The incomparable Johnson remained behind to pay bills, &c., &c.; the unapproachable Wheeler was in attendance to incur new ones! Scarce a rupture of their every-day routine.

But however great the privileges of wealth, it cannot ward off all 'the ills which flesh is heir to,' and long before her usual hour Miss Grantham retired, declaring she could sit up no longer.

'You ought really to take something warm, to promote perspiration, my dear,' said Lady Dormer. 'A mustard blister between the shoulders is very good in your case, for I am sure you have a bad, feverish cold.'

'Thank you, Aunt Dormer; I have something feverish, I am quite sure. Maggie, will you come up presently and bring my letters? I cannot look at them now.'

Maggie collected them, bid Lady Dormer good night, and put on her dressing-gown before she was summoned to Miss Grantham's room, for she could not reconcile herself to leaving her friend alone through the night. Miss Grantham was in bed when she came in, and said in an unusually high-pitched voice, 'There ought to be a letter for me from Torchester among those. Pray look for it and read it.'

Maggie obeyed, turning them all over till she found what she

thought was his Lordship's hieroglyphics, and handed it to Miss Grantham.

'Is that the one?'

'Yes; read it. Everything seems to swim before my eyes.'

Perhaps Lord Torchester might not like me to read it.'

'Pooh, nonsense! What matter about him; what matter about anything. Do as I tell you.'

There was a feverish impatience in her manner that left Maggie no choice save to obey. She accordingly read as follows:—

'My Dear Margaret,—I hope you have arrived all right. Bolton is better—that is, he has shown some consciousness, and spoken a few articulate words. It is a bad business for him. He has not only lost all he put into that unlucky bank, but he is liable for a lot more of uncalled up capital—nearly everything he is worth. Geoff is so far more fortunate that his shares were fully paid up. So they can get no more out of him. I haven't an idea what Geoff is going to do. I don't think he has himself; but he has already been making preparations to sell off his horses and lots of traps. He has a dark chestnut would make a splendid match for your Rufus. Would you like to buy him? Let me know. I never saw Geoff in better spirits. My mother wants him to make a home at the Beeches, and go into the prayer-meeting tract-distributing line; but I don't think that would suit, though my mother is a brick, after all.

'I fancy Geoff will join this expedition to discover something somewhere. Government is granting a subsidy, and I think it's just the thing for him. I saw Hillshire this morning. He says the appointment of Chief Justice of the Squashimodo Island is vacant, but fears they want a more practically experienced man than Geoff Trafford, which is nonsense. Poor old Bolton used to say Geoff was as good a lawyer as he was a sportsman; and you know there isn't a better shot anywhere. I am going down to Mount Trafford to-night, but return on Monday, when I hope to see you.

'I suppose there will be no having a word with you once the season has set in. I have some thoughts of starting a yacht. Mind you answer about the chestnut.

Yours truly,

'Torchester.'

'What a thoroughly heartless letter,' said Miss Grantham after a moment's pause.

'Heartless! I do not think so. Lord Torchester is evidently interested both for Mr Bolton and for Mr Trafford.'

'Yes; but you see the whole drift is dictated by his wish to banish Geoffrey away somewhere.'

'I cannot see that. He is anxious about his prospects.'

'And it is more than ever likely that Geoffrey will banish himself. Poor Geoff! How unfortunately everything has turned out!' (Another pause.) 'Give me the letter. I do not think I ever had a letter from Torchester before. What a hand he writes! How different from Geoff's clear, straight, stern-looking writing!'

'Yes, very,' said Maggie heartily and inadvertently.

'Where have *you* seen Mr Trafford's writing?' asked Miss Grantham, opening her blue eyes in great surprise.

'In a little note he once sent with some books and papers.'

'Where were they sent to you?' said Miss Grantham.

'In Paris. He was good enough to lend me some magazines and newspapers,' returned Maggie, falteringly and blushing.

'Have you the note still?' asked Miss Grantham.

'Oh, no! there was nothing in it,' cried Maggie, feeling unboundedly thankful that she had resisted her inclination to preserve that relic of delightful days, and had destroyed it in one of her sternly-resolved moods.

'It was all right, of course, that he should lend you books—he is very good-natured! But I have such strange fancies.' (A pause—then an abrupt exclamation)—'No; it is quite impossible. My head throbs so dreadfully! I will try and sleep.'

'And I will stay here till you do sleep, dear Miss Grantham. You must see Sir Henry H—— to-morrow.'

'I will if I am not better, and I do not think I shall be. Is it not dreadfully warm?'

'I will open the window a very little, and fan you till you go to sleep.'

Gradually the 'Restorer' stole over the young heiress's unnaturally bright blue eyes; and Maggie sat long motionless, holding the closed fan. She could not bring herself to leave her friend, who moaned, and uttered inarticulate murmurs through her troubled sleep. After a while she rose, lit a night light, and wrapping a shawl round her, took place once more by the sleeper, laying her hand on the bed, that, should Miss Grant-

ham wake suddenly, she should at once find she was watched and tended.

For a long time Maggie kept awake, her brain working vividly, recalling the last three or four days distinctly, painfully.

She did not think she would have felt so keenly Miss Grantham's intimation that Trafford was engaged or entangled in some way. Was it possible that, after having so often told herself that he never could be anything to her—after having submitted herself, as she thought, to this verdict of common sense, she had yet not succeeded in uprooting the terrible infatuation which had so entwined itself with her very being. She had done her best, and yet that desperate longing to see his face, to hear his voice, would not leave her. Surely much of this unconquerable weakness was owing to the vague, irresistible conviction which, now floating away almost completely, now gathering thickly over her, like mountain mists that melt and form and flit to and fro before they finally envelop hill and dale, never quite left her—the conviction that she was more to him in her lowliness, and, as she thought, unattractive simplicity, than Miss Grantham or any one else. Now she must give up that idea. His indifference to his beautiful kinswoman was due to some long-standing mysterious attachment—and she could never have been anything to him save a helpless, honest little girl, in whom he took a kindly interest. While to her, life was hopeless, colourless, savourless, unless she could reign supreme in his heart. No crumbs of affection thrown from the master's table would satisfy her. Freely she gave, freely she would look to receive. It was seldom Maggie let her soul speak out so freely to her of its cravings and needs. To-night she did not attempt to turn a deaf ear to its moan.

'I will think out all that has *so* long tormented me, and then all shall go back into silence for ever. I *must* get rid of my delusions now that they have been torn to pieces for me. Surely I shall now gather strength and be of a good courage.'

And so gradually she glided from thought into dreamland. But her sleep was broken. Suddenly a cry from Miss Grantham roused her; startled and wide awake—the sleeper had grasped her hand.

'Is it you, Maggie? Oh, how thankful I am to find you beside me! I have had such dreadful dreams. Is it day yet? How good of you to stay by me! Do not go, dear—do not leave me.

'I will not indeed! I did not intend to leave you. Lie down and try to rest, dear Miss Grantham.'

'What time is it? Is that daylight I see through the window?'

'It is. Why, it is nearly five o'clock; try to sleep, and I will call Cécile to get you some lemonade; your hands are so hot and dry.'

'Very well,' said Miss Grantham, faintly, and she lay down obediently.

As soon as he could be brought, an eminent physician was with the fair invalid. He put a good many questions, felt her pulse long and carefully, spoke cheerily, as these masters of our weakness know how to do, and departed, saying he would call again later. As he left the room, he passed Maggie, who was waiting outside. 'Come with me,' he said, and she followed him to Miss Grantham's study, where he sat down at her writing table.

'You are—?' said he, looking keenly and inquiringly into Maggie's face.

'Miss Grantham's secretary and companion,' she replied.

'Ah! you sat up with her last night. What was the period of greatest restlessness?'

'Between twelve and one.'

A few more queries and the great doctor rose.

'Is she very ill?' asked Maggie, with anxious eyes.

'She will want a good deal of care. Who is the family attendant?'

'Doctor Layton.'

'Let him be here at four this afternoon to meet me; and you had better have a nurse. Doctor Layton will see to that. Are you afraid of infection? No?—that's right. Miss Grantham seems to like you near her, and it is very important that a patient should like the attendant. You look cool and steadfast; get rid of the French maid. I will see Lady Dormer; but it is right to warn you there may be infection.'

'I have no fear,' said Maggie calmly.

'Good morning, then,' and the physician went away.

Maggie stood a moment where he had left her.

There was evidently a trying ordeal before her kind patroness, and, thank God, Maggie could be of use to her. No more dreams and selfish regrets, but real work, real service. So she stole softly back to the sick room, taking with her, by a natural instinct, some needlework, that she might not seem too oppressively watchful to

the invalid. And then the hours slid by wearily, yet not slowly, till the hour came round for the doctor's second visit.

It was late on the following Tuesday that Lord Torchester rushed into Trafford's chambers, and found him immersed in papers, with a shrewd, nondescript-looking man, in clerical-looking attire, not over new or fresh.

'Can I speak to you, Geoff?'

'Yes, in a minute or two. Now, Mr Carberry, though I do not want to keep those Cuyps of mine, understand me, I am not pressed for money. I will let them go for a hundred and fifty apiece, or—I will keep them. If you make up your mind by to-morrow at twelve, let me see you. Now I must say good morning.'

'Well, Sir, you shall see or hear from me to-morrow, about twelve,' and the nondescript man departed.

'What is it, Torchester?' said Trafford, turning his chair to face his visitor, whose agitated expression and visible uneasiness excited his curiosity.

'Margaret Grantham is dangerously ill.' H. was called in on Friday, and R. was sent for to-day; they say it is a bad case of typhus.'

'Typhus!' repeated Trafford, aghast. 'Impossible! where could she have caught typhus fever?'

'Heaven knows! They say Eastnor is badly drained; but it is an awful business, Geoff—so young and bright and beautiful as she was!'

'And *will* be,' said Trafford cheerily, laying his hand kindly on his cousin's shoulder. 'With her splendid health and untried constitution she will pull through. Who is with her?' he added.

'Oh, nurses and all sorts of people; but Lady Dormer says the only one she seems to know is Miss Grey, who sticks to her like a brick, in spite of the infection.'

'Infection,' repeated Trafford, looking intently into vacancy. 'It *is* frightfully infectious.'

'Of course it is. Lady Dormer's room was so powerfully impregnated with aromatic vinegar, that I could not stop sneezing; she is in an awful fright, but ashamed to run away. My mother is coming up to stay there, but it is quite unnecessary. Poor Margaret! she is such a plucky creature. I think she will get over it—eh Geoff?'

'I have every hope she will—nay, I feel as if she would. Still, it will be an anxious time. Did you hear any particulars?'

'I saw Layton, the family doctor. It seems she was complaining for a few days before they left Eastnor, and was very unwell the night they arrived in town.'

Trafford was silent. He was trying to estimate what share his last interview with the bright impulsive girl had in her illness; but being inclined to view matters by the light of common sense, he soon dismissed the idea.

'Come and dine with me,' said Lord Torchester. 'I do not seem as if I could go to the Club and listen to fellows talking, and betting, and—let us have a quiet dinner at home.'

'Very well. I neither like to be alone nor with a multitude to-day,' returned Trafford, beginning to arrange his papers and put them away. 'I have one or two places to go to, and will be with you at 7.30.'

The Earl departed to wander to and fro and try to distract his thoughts until his mother's arrival, which he looked forward to as a source of comfort more than he would have cared to allow.

Meanwhile the routine of the sick room had been fully established, and Maggie was absorbed in her anxious watch. It seemed to her as if the days of health and sunshine and blitheness had been pushed back years, and that it was a whole age since Miss Grantham was laid upon the bed of sickness.

As yet the sufferer was only unconscious or wandering at times, but the intervals of composure and clearness were fewer and shorter. Maggie's whole heart was wrapped up in her anxiety to save so dear and precious a life. She could scarce be persuaded to leave her patient, and just took sufficient rest to keep herself equal to her work. *That* she snatched in the day, as her presence always seemed to exercise a soothing influence on Miss Grantham.

Evening had just begun to darken on the fifth day, when a message was cautiously whispered to Miss Grey that Mr Trafford was in the study, and begged she would speak to him, if only for a minute.

'Have you told Mr Trafford of the danger of the infection?'

'Yes, ma'am; but he says he knows it, and must speak to you.'

Maggie went quickly to the room, where Trafford was pacing to and fro.

'How is she?' he said, coming towards her with an outstretched hand.

'Just now sleeping uneasily,' replied Maggie, drawing back; 'but the fever increases. No, Mr Trafford; it would be folly to run unnecessary risks. Keep as far as you can. I can tell you everything as well at this distance.' And she gave him a rapid sketch of what had occurred, of the cautiously-worded opinion of Sir H—— of the present condition of the patient.

'It is a bad business,' said Trafford. 'Nevertheless, I think there is every hope.'

'God grant it! But, oh, if you saw her!' Maggie's voice broke, and she pressed her hand over her eyes, standing quite still to recover her self-possession.

Trafford took the hand that hung down despondently. She tried to draw it away. 'No, I have not the slightest fear,' said he; 'I have been near all sorts of fevers. But you—did they warn you of the danger to which you expose yourself by being constantly in such an atmosphere? You ought not to have undertaken such a task when there was plenty of care at hand.'

'Yes, but not quite like mine,' returned Maggie. 'I love her so well; and then I seem to be a little comfort to her. But I need not explain to *you* that it would have been impossible to leave her —you know I could not.'

'Yes, I understand it. Yet I think of your danger.' He let her hand go, and paced the room for a few turns.

'After all,' resumed Maggie, simply, 'my life is not of so much importance. I have no father or mother, or any one to live for. Not,' she added quickly—for Trafford stopped short, and looked at her with lips apart as if to speak—'not that I am tired of life or wish to get rid of it. It has been far better than I once dared to hope. But I must go back.'

'Well,' said Trafford, taking her hand in both his, 'good-bye; but promise to come here and give me a report once every day. You do not know how deeply, painfully anxious I am. Poor dear Margaret! It is impossible that such a healthy life can be swept away. Good-bye, Maggie; take what care you can of yourself.'

When Maggie returned to the sick room Miss Grantham was awake and conscious. 'Where have you been?' she asked feebly. Maggie told her, adding a few words descriptive of Mr Trafford's great anxiety about her. Miss Grantham smiled, and then said,

with some energy, 'You must not go to him again, Maggie; he will take this horrid fever. Geoff must be a great man yet.'

This was nearly the last rational sentence she uttered for many days, though she often muttered his name; and Maggie religiously obeyed her, for more reasons than one.

And now weary nights succeeded weary days. The doctors' faces grew grave, and after a fortnight of varying replies to many inquirers came the sad words, so sadly uttered, 'Sinking fast.'

'I do not say, my dear Sir,' said the great doctor to Trafford, who with Lord Torchester had scarcely left the house for the last twelve hours, 'that she cannot recover; but I dare not give you hope.

And so the hours sped on. Maggie, composed but hopeless, too strained to think even of grief, watched untiringly, ever ready with milk, or medicines, or stimulants to wet the parched lips, and give some atom of help to the fluttering, struggling life.

Then came the faintest hope just suffusing the aching hearts of the anxious watchers. The night through which they had not dared to hope she would last was gone, and she still lived, and so through the succeeding day. Every hour of prolonged existence was a gain. At first they scarce ventured to listen to happier anticipations; but the second day Maggie felt she would not die. Then the doctors looked bright, and gradually the reluctant life came back into its fair dwelling, and she was safe.

'A wonderful recovery, my dear Countess,' said Sir H—— to Lady Torchester on the fourth morning after the terrible night on which there had been no hope. He was speaking to the family conclave; for, although Lady Torchester had not been allowed into the sick room, she had stayed with Lady Dormer. 'A most wonderful recovery; and much of it due to good nursing. That little Miss Grey has been quite invaluable. Such presence of mind—such untiring watchfulness!'

'The nurse that Doctor Layton sent was very good also?' asked Lady Torchester.

'Excellent; but when you can get a nurse who knows and loves the patient, and yet has the pluck and reason not to be unnerved by her feeling, that is perfection. Good morning, Lady Torchester—good morning, Lady Dormer. We shall do now, I think.'

'What a first-rate little brick Miss Grey is!' cried Lord Torchester, his broad, beaming face showing how great was his relief. 'I am going to dine at the "club." Will you come, Geoff?'

'No, thank you. I am going to see poor Bolton. He has expressed a wish to see me.'

'Ah!' said Lady Torchester. 'I hope he has some one near to rouse him to a sense of his unhappy state.'

'Poor old fellow!' replied the Earl. 'I hope he has not. He is badly off enough without that.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A MONTH had gone pleasantly by with all the daily-increasing happiness of convalescence. Miss Grantham had been most carefully removed to the Beeches, as the doctors had recommended some change as soon as possible; and Lady Torchester's house was the perfection of comfort and prettiness. Thither Maggie was also transported, as Miss Grantham declared herself unable to do without her.

Aunt Dormer was sent to recruit at Mrs Longmore's country seat, where a maiden sister of Mr Longmore's always resided in and out of season.

A couple of charming rooms were given up to Miss Grantham. They looked out upon the Park, and delicious odours of May blossoms and freshly-cut grass were wafted through the open windows.

'How sweet life is!' said Miss Grantham softly, as she lay upon her sofa, drawn near the window, enjoying the simple fact of existence free from suffering. 'I do not deserve all the good that is heaped upon me. How kind every one is! Maggie, you have been an angel to me. I shall never forget it—never.'

'Do not talk too much, or excite yourself,' said Maggie.

'I feel quite strong to-day,' resumed the heiress. 'And I have wanted to know all the news, but was too weak to ask. How is poor Mr Bolton? Tell me everything.'

'I hear he is very weak and helpless, but quite sensible. I believe he has lost all his money.'

'And what is Torchester doing?'

'Oh! he is here constantly—so anxious to see you. He was in such despair when you were ill.'

'Poor fellow! I do not deserve that either. I will see him to-morrow, if they will let me.' A long pause. 'Maggie, do you know nothing of Geoffrey Trafford? Did he not care if I lived or died?'

'He did—he did indeed! No one, I am told, could have shown deeper anxiety about you; but he never quite despaired of you.'

'Ah!' began Miss Grantham, and stopped. There was a sad, disappointed tone in the 'Ah!'

'And you know nothing of Mr Trafford?'

'I have heard nothing of him for some time.'

'Maggie,' he is not gone to—to—where is the place? He has not left England?'

'No, no,' cried Maggie, alarmed at the bright flush that rose to the invalid's brow. 'I should certainly have heard it. Now, I must insist on your taking some more arrowroot and trying to sleep. You know you are to go out for the first time since you came down here to-day, and you must not exhaust yourself. Lady Torchester can tell you everything I do not know.'

The heiress obeyed with the unquestionable submission she generally gave to Maggie, and which was touching as compared to her imperiousness when in health.

It was a curious result. Maggie could not help thinking of the strange eddies of circumstance that had brought her here to be the favoured guest of Lady Torchester—Trafford's aunt, the Earl's mother; and then the conviction pressed upon her that it could not last; that something must happen to cut her adrift, and cast her out of that pleasant, polished, untroubled world where the claws of those tiger-cats, want and care and rugged necessity, were ever hidden and disused in their velvet paws. She was deeply grieved, too, that Miss Grantham had come out of the terrible ordeal through which she had just passed, still yearning fruitlessly for Trafford's love.

To know that he was engaged or attached to some one else ought to have cured her, but the 'still small voice' suggested to Maggie something about the beam in her own eye, and so she cut short her reflections, and called Cécile to have all Miss Grantham's wraps ready, as she was to go out at twelve with Lady Torchester.

The next day, after some hesitation, the Earl was admitted to see Miss Grantham.

She was looking exquisitely, delicately lovely, wrapped in a white muslin dressing-gown, plentifully adorned with blue ribbons.

'Oh, Tor, I am so pleased to see you!'

Lord Torchester's heart was full; at no time eloquent, he was now quite speechless. He took her hand in both of his, bent over it for a moment to hide his emotion, and at last said, rather huskily, 'Thank God, you are all right!'

Miss Grantham was much struck by the feeling he showed, and his strong and successful effort to control it. She ever after showed a greater degree of respect for him.

'You must not exert yourself, my dear Margaret,' said Lady Torchester, who mounted guard over the invalid each day at a certain hour, armed with a thick volume of sermons, addresses, meditations, or expositions; and if not watched and delicately manœuvred by Maggie, would have insisted on deluging her victim with large doses of the above mixtures. 'And you must not excite her, Torchester.'

'I am afraid,' said the Earl, laughing good-humouredly, 'there is very little chance of my doing so—eh, Margaret?'

'Oh, it is so nice to hear you talk again, dear Tor! It is really like coming back to life. I feel as if I should like to ride so much.'

'You must not think of such a thing for weeks,' cried the Countess.

'Well, my dear mother, I may drive Margaret to-morrow in your pony carriage; you know I am a good whip.'

'But to-morrow—Thursday—did you not think of seconding Lord E——'s motion?'

'Yes. Nevertheless, if you will put me up to-night, and Margaret can go out tolerably early, I can manage both.'

'And are you going to speak in the House? I am so glad. What are you going to say?' cried Miss Grantham.

'Very little; nevertheless, it will be a beginning. But you will drive with me to-morrow morning?'

'Yes, certainly—directly I am dressed. And, Torchester, tell me all the news—about Mr Bolton, and the Stamers, and Geoff—everything.'

'Bolton is a sad wreck, though better on the whole than could have been expected at first. His speech is much improved, but

his right hand is nearly useless. He is to go away for change of scene and air. I met Mrs Stamer and the girls at the Duchess's reception last night, and I think there is a very promising flirtation between Mary and St Lawrence. Erskine is in Paris; so is Lady Brockhurst—and Geoff——'

'Yes, what is he doing?'

'Oh! he has moved into chambers in Gray's Inn. He has routed out all his old law books, and bought a blue bag and a wig, and is going in for the Woolsack Stakes in the most determined manner. He is in Court all day taking notes, and has cut every one. Will not dine out—goes nowhere, I believe, but to see Bolton, whose seizure, I believe, is principally caused by his grief about having drawn Geoff into that unlucky banking concern.'

'What a change!' exclaimed Miss Grantham. 'How dreadful!'

'It is, indeed,' echoed Lady Torchester; 'and yet his manner is as bright as ever. I should not wonder if he is very successful; still I cannot help thinking that his hard work tells upon him—he looked so dark and worn when I saw him last. But he has not lost quite everything, has he?' she added.

'Everything except a miserable three hundred a year.'

'And what is this dreadful place he has gone to live in?' asked Miss Grantham.

'Gray's Inn—not so bad after all. I dined with Geoff there the other day, and met a queer fellow—a barrister. We were uncommonly jolly. Geoff was most amusing, and the other man—I forget his name—is a great character. Lemoine, Geoff's Canadian, is with him still—a first-rate servant.

'And does Geoffrey Trafford associate with all these horrid people who live in this Gray's Inn?' said Miss Grantham.

'A good many; but, you know, he is too much of a cosmopolite to be fanciful and exclusive.'

'No, I do not think either of you could have been very exclusive, considering that you frequented Mrs Berry's soirées.'

The Earl coloured.

'What in the world induced you to go there?' persisted Miss Grantham.

'I can hardly tell. I got into a card-playing set in Paris, and they all went. Geoffrey went there, I believe, to look after me.'

'The less said about it all the better,' observed Lady Torchester stiffly. 'It is not our province to inquire into the follies and errors of young men, especially when they are repented of and abjured.'

Miss Grantham glanced mischievously at her cousin. 'You must have lost a lot of money, Tor,' said she, 'or you would never have abjured it.'

The Earl laughed. 'I did not escape unscathed,' said he.

'Margaret must not talk any more,' observed the Countess. 'You must go away, my dear boy.'

'One word before you go, Tor. Does Geoffrey remember that I have survived? does he ever intend to come and see me?'

'Of course he does—he is only waiting permission. Ask him to come down on Saturday and stay till Monday,' said the Countess. 'It seems an age since I saw him.'

'Don't forget you are to drive me out to-morrow morning,' added the heiress, giving her hand to her cousin with a smile so caressingly sweet that, but for the Countess's awful presence, Lord Torchester might have summoned courage to take a kiss, and in Miss Grantham's sunny mood might have been forgiven. As it was, he left her presence more in love than ever.

Descending the stairs he met Maggie, who had just come from the garden with her hands full of flowers, in the hall.

'How do you do, Miss Grey? I am so glad to see you. What a trump you have been! If ever I am ill, I wish I had a chance of having you for a nurse. You might, you know, considering. Well, we mustn't talk of bygones'—a gay laugh—'Miss Grantham is nearly all right again. I never saw her look lovelier.' The Earl was too excited to be prudent.

'She does indeed. I am sure we all feel as if we had been respited from the grave by her recovery. Are you going up to town?'

'Yes, but I am coming back to dine and sleep, for I am to drive Margaret out in my mother's pony-carriage to-morrow'—an irrepressible tone of triumph. 'And how are you yourself after all your fatigue? I say,' continued the Earl, with a sudden accession of foresight, 'Miss Grantham is deucedly curious as to why Trafford and I used to go to Mrs Berry's—she will be sure to pump you——' A slightly awkward pause, for the Earl suddenly remembered that it would be awkward to ask a young lady to conceal the fact that he had proposed to her. But Maggie relieved him.

'Trust me, Lord Torchester,' she said, with a mischievous smile. 'You are quite safe.'

'I believe I am with you! and you can't think how fond I was

of you; and so I am still, only—' His lordship broke off abruptly, a little shocked at his own candour.

'Is it not cruel of you to remind me of all I have lost?' said she laughing. 'Confess, now, you are infinitely obliged to me for not having been equally fond of you?'

'If you had, everything would have been quite different.'

'There, say no more, my lord! I'll keep counsel about poor Mrs Berry's soirées. Of course you were brought there by M. de Bragance?'

'Exactly; and Geoffrey only came on my account.'

As Lord Torchester spoke he happened to be looking straight into Maggie's face, and in spite of her earnest effort for composure the bright tell-tale colour mounted in her cheeks, and even flushed her brow. A sudden light seemed to break in upon Lord Torchester but he only said, 'Good-bye, then,' and departed.

Maggie, hoping and hastily concluding that the Earl did not notice her absurd accession of colour, turned into Lady Torchester's morning-room to arrange her flowers.

Meantime the Earl gathered up the reins of the two fast trotters which were to whirl him back to his engagements in town, in deep thought. 'Was it possible that Geoff had been spoony on little Maggie Grey, or made love to her?' There was an interval when he remained behind in Paris which was unaccounted for; lots of mischief might have been done in that time. The Earl hoped that Trafford had not been making a fool of himself or Miss Grey. 'By Jove, I would never forgive him if he played fast and loose with her! she is such a little brick; but it would be a curious affair if Geoff, who I am certain came to choke me off, was caught himself.'

When Maggie entered the morning-room she was a little surprised to find Lady Torchester standing in one of the windows, not looking over-well pleased.

As soon as the Earl had closed the door Miss Grantham declared her intention of going to sleep, and the Countess, having letters to write, left her, intending to send her maid to keep watch.

On reaching the stair she was somewhat ruffled to find her son and *that* Miss Grey in close and cordial conversation, and as she passed into the morning-room could not help hearing the Earl say, 'If you had, everything would have been quite different.' Could it be possible that demure, designing little Miss Grey was again twining herself round the unsuspicious noble-hearted boy? Now

that she was more than ever anxious he should marry Margaret Grantham—to whom, in her present gentle and submissive mood, the good Countess was growing warmly attached—it was alarming, once more she would consult Geoffrey, who had been her good angel on the former occasion.

When poor Maggie beheld the Countess standing there with clouded brow, the colour which had been called up by the Earl's eyes again deepened, and she said with some confusion—

'I did not know you were here, Lady Torchester.'

'Probably,' said that lady drily. 'You had better go up to Miss Grantham. She is sleeping but ought not to be left alone.' And Maggie, her ears tingling, and feeling she had been rebuffed—why, she knew not—took herself and her flowers elsewhere.

The succeeding days were a little anxious, for Miss Grantham was not quite so well; she was restless and slightly feverish. Lord Torchester was in despair—was it his fault? Had he talked too much to her, or let her talk too much? Did Miss Grey think he had kept her out too long? For the Earl turned naturally for comfort to Maggie; she was so kind; she seemed to enter into his feelings for Miss Grantham like a real friend; there was so much simple common sense in her opinions, that the young man was always in search of her, if not with his cousin, during his brief but frequent visits to the Beeches.

His lady mother, however, pondered all these things in her heart, and very unpalatable food for thought she found them.

Maggie had always felt herself at a disadvantage with Lady Torchester; she was conscious that the Countess could not quite forgive her for having attracted the heir of Trafford, nor perhaps the sort of mastery of the position which her disinterested rejection of the young peer bestowed. Then Maggie was a malignant, and did not disguise her malignancy. She had on one occasion acknowledged that she would have no objection whatever to meet a Catholic, or, worse still, an 'Anglican,' in another and a better world; and so far from being a safe and evangelical influence to dear Margaret Grantham, she rather confirmed that young lady's Broad Church proclivities. Lady Torchester therefore found herself heartily wishing the favourite secretary away, though it would be hard to uproot her now, after her devotion—her successful devotion to the young heiress; yet if Margaret was ordered abroad, as there was every probability, it would be absurd to take Miss Grey. The Countess determined to feel her way with the little

secretary rather than with the self-willed Margaret, who, at the slightest suggestion to the contrary, would very likely have declared her resolution never to part with Maggie during the term of her natural life.

There was another subject which troubled the even surface of that spiritual tranquillity on which, as an advanced Christian, the Countess prided herself. The interest which Miss Grantham evinced in Geoffrey, favoured though he was by his aunt, was anything but satisfactory to that lady. The young heiress had somewhat incautiously relieved the tedium of Lady Torchester's companionship, and avoided the infliction of sundry memoirs of deceased divines, by indulging in rather unlimited disquisitions on Geoffrey Trafford's past, present, and future. Moreover, the Earl had observed to his mother when he had returned from Llanelwy 'that Margaret Grantham was quite devoted to Geoff Trafford, and would believe black was white if Geoff said so'—a mere ebullition of ill-temper on the young man's part, as Miss Grantham had snubbed him considerably; but his words sank into his mother's heart. Fond though she was of her favourite nephew, she did not like the idea of his carrying off the Grantham heiress from her son. Torchester, though evidently fond of his cousin, might possibly, if he thought Geoff preferred to himself, turn his attentions and affections to that Miss Grey. And here were all the *dramatis personæ* of the plot gathered under her roof! It was enough to ruffle the heavenly composure of the most advanced Christian.

With some idea of suggesting to her that she was *de trop* in the Grantham establishment, Lady Torchester invited Maggie to drive with her after luncheon on the Saturday when Lord Torchester and Mr Trafford were expected to dinner.

'Yes; pray go,' said Miss Grantham. 'It will be a little change for you.'

'And, Margaret, my dear,' observed Lady Torchester as she was leaving the room, 'I need not impress upon you the importance of extreme quiet; pray do not see Torchester or Geoff, should they arrive before I return. They are both so pleased to see you are better that they will talk too much; but, indeed, I scarcely expect Geoffrey. Torchester did not think he would come till tomorrow.'

'Oh, do not be uneasy,' replied Miss Grantham—Maggie thought, a little evasively.

The drive was very tranquil and unexciting until Lady Tor-

chester began to talk of Miss Grantham; her wonderful recovery; Maggie's admirable devotion; the evidently profound attachment she felt towards her charming employer; and that it would be, no doubt, a pang to part, should Miss Grantham (as was most likely) be ordered to the south of France or Italy. But the whole family were aware of the obligations they were under to Miss Grey; and whatever occurred Miss Grey's interests should not suffer.

Maggie felt painfully puzzled. Why did Lady Torchester speak in this way to her—as if to let her know she was to be pensioned off and swept out of the life with which she had so far been identified? Could it be possible Miss Grantham had commissioned her to speak thus, in order to rid herself of an obligation? No! her heart at once replied. Margaret Grantham was too frank, and true, and generous, to employ any go-between to do or say that from which she would herself shrink.

So she listened with a choking sensation, said very little, and allowed the Countess to entangle herself in her talk; and that lady, observing her companion's reticence, decided that Miss Grey was a designing little minx, exceedingly dangerous as an inmate, and certainly to be got rid of.

While poor Maggie was undergoing this mild species of torture, Trafford and the Earl arrived at the Beeches. On finding that the Countess was out driving with Miss Grey, both gentlemen strolled out to smoke in the grounds, not venturing to present themselves to Miss Grantham in the absence of both her guardians.

That young lady, however, espied them from her window, and despatched Cécile to summon Mr Trafford to her presence.

It was more than Margaret Grantham's eager indulged nature could brook to wait the Countess's return for that interview she had so longed for and anticipated. Not even Maggie, though she had her suspicions, had anything like a correct idea of the burning, craving desire which possessed Miss Grantham to right herself with Trafford, as she termed it in her own mind, by which she meant to remove the impression that she was hopelessly in love with him herself, and convey the idea that she was impelled to speak to him as she did at Eastnor by a temporary whim, principally induced by a generous desire to retrieve his fortune.

Then if she could succeed in persuading him that she had fallen back upon a mere sisterly affection, he might begin to think of what he had lost, or perhaps confide to her on whom he had bestowed his affections; and who could it possibly be was a question that re-

turned again and again to perplex her in vain. For, considering Trafford's various wanderings, it might have been some Indian, Canadian, Egyptian, Persian, or Norwegian beauty that had captivated him. 'And I am sure she is married,' was generally Miss Grantham's conclusion, 'for Geoffrey Trafford is not the man to let a trifle stand between him and a woman he really loved.' One dim preposterous suspicion sometimes flitted across her fancy, to be chased thence as too ridiculous, too absurd; it was the idea that little Maggie Grey might have been the secret cause of Trafford's mysterious visits to Mrs Berry. But this was impossible. Maggie, though the dearest creature, and very nice, was quite plain at times, and scarcely ever absolutely pretty; and that a man like Trafford, accustomed to the *crême de la crême* of society, to the fairest women, to herself! should bestow a thought upon so very unpretending a little blossom was indeed a preposterous idea. Yet that drive in the Bois de Boulogne, described by Madame de Beaumanoir, she could never quite get over that, in spite of Miss Grey's frank explanation.

These thoughts thronged her brain for the hundred and fiftieth time while she waited for Mr Trafford to appear. What an age it seemed since Cécile left the room. At last the door reopened, Cécile said '*Entrez, Monsieur*,' and he was in her presence once more.

'My dear Margaret—I am so glad to see you again!' He was kind and cordial, but there was no trace of the overpowering emotion that nearly choked poor Lord Torchester.

Miss Grantham found it less easy to reply. She did not before know how weak she was. How delightful to hear his voice again! that pleasantly modulated voice with a ring of cheerfulness and decision in it.

'Ah, Geoff!' leaving her hand in his—'I thought I should never see you or any one else again.'

'I never quite despaired of you. Though none of us would like to live through those days of terrible anxiety again. And now you are looking—better than ever.'

Trafford drew a chair opposite Miss Grantham's sofa, and facing the door, to which her back was turned.

A short and slightly embarrassed pause ensued. The awkwardness of their last parting was present to the minds of both. At last Miss Grantham, with a woman's social courage, and availing herself of the old frank intimacy which had existed between them for so many years, looked up with a kind of blushing archness very love-

ly and attractive, and said, smiling, 'Don't suppose, Monsieur, that I was so ill simply because you would neither have the half nor the whole of Grantham. The enemy had laid hold of me before that, and I have risen from the combat clothed and in my right mind. So we are old friends, and nothing else, once more, eh?'

Trafford was greatly pleased to hear her speak thus; it relieved him from a sort of haunting self-reproach; it confirmed the friendly esteem he liked to feel for his fair kinswoman, and settled the footing of their future intercourse.

'Pray do not suppose me such a conceited blockhead as to have imagined anything of the kind. I know you well, dear Margaret; and I trust, even had circumstances been different, I should never have taken advantage of what was, I have no doubt, a generous, momentary impulse.'

'You are quite a clairvoyant, Geoff,' said Miss Grantham, smiling. 'So we are friends again. All right.' She held out her hand as she spoke. Trafford took it in both his, and looking into her face with kindly brotherly admiration—

'What luck some fellow will be in,' he said, 'some of these days, when he wins this hand and the heart that will go with it!'

Miss Grantham shivered slightly. Could she ever bestow either on any other but this contradictory, provoking creature, for whom she yet hoped she had some attraction? 'Oh, my love affairs are all to come,' she said, laughing lightly. 'I shall look to you as a chief counsellor when they do come. Now, tell me all about yourself, dear Geoffrey. What are you doing? Tor gives a wonderful account of you. Yet you do not look broken-hearted.'

'On the contrary, I feel remarkably cheerful. I have taken chambers in (to you) an unknown locality. I flourish in a horsehair wig and a black gown the greater part of every day, to see if I can get a bite—that is, a brief. My sitting-room is as solemn as ranges of law books, papers, ink, and red tape can make it. And after the long vacation you will perhaps see in *The Times* law reports some mention of Mr G. Trafford being *with* Cuddlestone, Q.C., or Kerridge, Q.C., or the celebrated Serjeant Eglantine. Then, if you have any regard for the success of your kinsman, pray for the sickness or sudden death of any or all of these eminent counsel, and so shall I have a chance of addressing "My lord" or "the gentlemen of the jury."'

'But is it not awfully *triste*, Geoff, all alone in such a place? Do you never ride, or dine at the club, or go anywhere?'

'I have no horses, and "I haven't got no club." I have broken with my past life, and have gone in for work. But I never felt less *tristesse*. I have no time for it. You must not suppose that I am living up a court or down an alley. Gray's Inn is a very distinguished locality. I tell you what it is, Margaret, when you are better and stronger, you and Lady Torchester must come to luncheon with me. It will be entirely new ground to you. I will receive you in my court dress, and it will be no end of a lark.'

Miss Grantham clapped her hands in childish delight at the idea. She would be quite equal to lunch at Gray's Inn next week. It would be so new and droll. 'And we will have Torchester.' The young heiress was radiant; she had not felt so happy since that last meeting at Eastnor. Trafford was just about to reply, when the door opened gently.

Miss Grantham's eyes were on her companion's face, and she was suddenly struck and silenced by the expression which flashed across it—a quick vivid gleam of irrepressible joy—a something she had never read in it before; and the next moment it was gone, and Trafford's face was dark and quiet as usual. He rose, however, but did not speak or advance from his place.

'Who is it?' asked Miss Grantham, feeling certain whose voice would answer.

'Maggie,' was the reply, as that culprit hesitated on the threshold. 'I thought you were alone;' for Lady Torchester had been informed, on reaching home, that 'My lord and Mr Trafford had arrived about an hour ago, and had gone out in the grounds.'

'Well, come in,' said Miss Grantham, with just a tinge of impatience in her tone.

Maggie obeyed, and advanced to the invalid's sofa.

'We meet under brighter circumstances than when last I had, I must say, the pain of seeing you, Miss Grey,' observed Mr Trafford drawing a chair forward.

'Yes, it was a terrible time then.' Maggie kept her eyes carefully averted. She was greatly annoyed at having broken in upon this *tête-à-tête*, and not a little disturbed by such a sudden meeting with Trafford.

'I am surprised and charmed to find Miss Grantham looking so marvellously well—better, I mean—than I had hoped; the result, I suppose, of sound health and good care.' A slight bow to Maggie.

'Have you had a pleasant drive?' asked Miss Grantham languidly.

'Oh, yes; and as you are not alone, I will leave you. I shall be in my room, if you want me.'

Trafford crossed to the door, and opened it for her. She bent her head in acknowledgment, but kept her eyes on the ground.

'Yes,' said Trafford, resuming his seat, and looking quickly and keenly into his companion's face; 'a luncheon at Gray's Inn will be an adventure for you, and cast a halo round my dingy chambers which will light them up for many a day. However, as their dimensions are by no means magnificent, we must not indulge in too large a party. We will allow Lady Torchester one parson, and yourself one adorer beside Tor, always provided it be not Sir Hugh Erskine; and I am to be permitted to introduce two natives in or out of the costume of the country.'

Miss Grantham's attention was caught and amused by this quick resumption of the subject, as Trafford intended it should, for he had noticed the sudden change in her voice and face as Maggie entered.

'Poor Sir Hugh!' said she, with a slight coquetry of manner. 'Why do you dislike him; he is very nice?'

'Oh, for a complication of reasons—or no reason.'

'I found a hecatomb of his cards when I was able to look at such things. Is he still in town?'

'That I cannot tell. I know town in your sense no longer.'

'But, Geoffrey, you cannot keep this up; you cannot live always apart from every one and everything you have been used to?'

'I think I shall. Moreover, I do not think I have much choice. And you must remember I never degenerated into a regular London man. I belong to a wider circle. Will you cut me altogether when I have settled thoroughly to my place and have got my shoulder to the collar?'

'Geoffrey!' said Miss Grantham, with what seemed to Trafford an alarmingly tender intonation.

'You must not let me stay too long,' he resumed. 'I do not feel at all inclined to go, but I ought not to tire you.'

'You do not—not in the least. Do you know, Geoff, as we are going to be faster friends than ever, you really ought to tell me whom you are engaged to, just as a mark of confidence?'

This most unexpected attack surprised and rather nettled him. He thought it indiscreet of his fair kinswoman, to say the least.

'Engaged!' he repeated. 'Who says I am engaged?'

'I thought—I understood you were,' replied Miss Grantham, a little falteringly.

'I have not taken vows of celibacy,' said Trafford, smiling; 'and possibly one of these days, when I make that famous speech which is to carry away judge and jury, and prove that black is white, when solicitors grow obsequious and briefs numerous, I may present a Mrs Geoffrey Trafford to you; but it is rather a remote contingency.'

'She must be very nice, Geoff—a thorough gentlewoman, remember, or I shall have nothing to say to either of you.'

Her words and tone struck Trafford as peculiar; but he replied at once carelessly, with a pleasant laugh, 'I trust she will meet with your approbation; but however mistaken my judgment may be, it is probable I shall be principally anxious to please myself.'

'A defiance of my opinion,' thought Miss Grantham, who paused before replying, in some uncertainty. And while she hesitated, Lady Torchester, having divested herself of her out-door dress, came in to bestow some of her society on the invalid.

'You here, Geoffrey!' exclaimed the Countess, feeling an unusual degree of annoyance at the sight of her nephew in such close and friendly conversation with the heiress. 'I thought, Margaret, you said you would not see any one till I came back?'

'Did I? Well, I ought not to have said so, for it is so long since I saw Geoff, I was sure not to wait till you came in.'

'Has Miss Grey been with you since we returned?'

'Yes; she just looked in, and went to take off her bonnet.'

'I am surprised she did not mention Geoffrey was here.'

Maggie rose twenty per cent. in Miss Grantham's estimation.

'As I am evidently a transgressor, I shall depart,' said Trafford.

'Oh, I am delighted to see you, Geoffrey; but I am so anxious that Margaret should not be imprudent or over-exert herself. It would be so terrible to have her thrown back while she is under my care.'

'Or any one else's, I imagine. Well, I will go and look for Torchester.'

'And tell him I will see him this evening, after he has dined But he must come up in good time. I go to my room at nine.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

'GEOFFREY,' said Lady Torchester, as she sat in the drawing room window, after their five o'clock Sunday dinner the next evening. 'I scarcely think *that* is wise or prudent.' And she nodded towards a couple who were leisurely strolling to and fro on the soft mossy grass of the pleasure-ground, where the spreading beech trees sheltered them from the evening sun. The couple were of course the Earl and Maggie.

Trafford rose from his semi-recumbent position in an easy-chair, and looked out gravely and steadily before he replied.

'I do not think you have any cause for alarm, my dear aunt. I imagine Torchester is quite safe in that quarter.'

'I am by no means sure. I cannot quite make out that little Miss Grey. It must be an enormous temptation; and she is so very uncommunicative. I confess I cannot share your and Margaret's infatuation about her.'

'Why—because you are afraid Tor is too fond of her?'

'Not altogether; but she has a way of adhering to her own opinions, which are far from orthodox, not becoming in a young person. Not, I admit, that she does so rudely—she is very well bred—but I do not think her a good companion for Margaret, who, though she is very fond of her, is, I can see from some conversation we had this morning, not so averse to part with her as I expected.'

'And yet this unorthodox companion risked her life for Margaret little more than two months ago.'

'So did the nurse, or nurses; though I am far from denying that we all owe a debt of gratitude to Miss Grey. I should be the last to deny it. But should Margaret consult you, Geoffrey, as she may probably, for you have a large amount of influence with her—a remarkable amount,' repeated the Countess, rather peevishly, 'I hope you will say nothing to induce Margaret to keep her.'

'Margaret must be considerably changed, or different from what I imagine her, if she will readily part with Maggie Grey.'

'It is astonishing to me the familiarity with which you all speak of Miss Grey—and to her.'

'To her! No, I should not dare to call her by her Christian name deliberately,' said Trafford, laughing, but dimly conscious that he had done so on one or two occasions. 'Come, my dear aunt, be true to your better and unconventional instinct; trust to Miss Grey's rectitude, and your son's preoccupation. Can't you see he is fathoms deep in love with our fair Margaret? And if you only let things alone, all will be as you wish.'

'As I wish, Geoffrey?' echoed Lady Torchester. 'You know I do not permit myself to form worldly projects. I am attached to dear Margaret, and in spite of faith, the weakness of the flesh makes me anxious for my son's future, though I ought to trust it to a higher power. Nevertheless——'

'The carriage is at the door, my lady,' announced the butler.

Lady Torchester looked unhappy and undecided. It was her habit on Sunday evenings to attend the ministrations of a Wesleyan preacher, whose 'awakening discourses' were calculated to counteract the drowsy influences of summer heat. The energetic volubility and startling denunciations of the broad-shouldered, thick-necked Wesleyan acted as a spiritual dram upon her ladyship's nervous system, and wound up the Sunday's devotion in a satisfactory fashion. But on the present occasion she was in doubt. On the one side was the word of comfort and exhortation, on the other four contumacious and wrong-headed young people, who, the moment she was out of sight, would pair off exactly as they ought not; for sundry small indications in Miss Grantham's talk and manner had suggested dim uncomfortable suspicions of the family Mentor. It was possible that Margaret Grantham might prefer her nephew to her son, and, if so, the Countess's soul might be exercised thereby; but she could neither prevent it nor complain. All this 'rushed through her brain' as she hesitated; and Geoffrey, who had also been thinking while he watched her countenance, exclaimed: 'It is too bad that you should be bored in this way, or be cut off from your usual Sunday routine. Go to church, or meeting, or whatever it is, with a quiet mind. I will play dragon, and trust me, Torchester shall not have a word alone with poor Miss Grey during your absence. I will take her to church myself, if you wish it?' He spoke with much animation, and a half-suppressed smile.

'My dear Geoffrey that would be quite unnecessary. However, as you are going to remain at home, I think I may as well drive over to Salem Chapel as usual.' And the Countess sailed away.

Trafford stood for a few minutes in thought, and then stepping through the open window, joined Lord Torchester and Maggie, who had been enjoying a pleasant desultory talk, chiefly about Miss Grantham, but occasionally glancing at their Paris experiences; for having once got over the awkwardness of alluding to them, and finding Miss Grey perfectly frank and kindly, there was no one except Miss Grantham to whom the Earl liked talking better.

'Had this young fellow's heart remained empty, swept, and garnished,' thought Trafford, as he approached them, 'until he had again encountered the old love, she would have entered in and effected a stronger lodgment than ever. His last state would have been infinitely worse than the first. It was lucky he fell in with Margaret. Lucky for who?' Leaving this profound question unanswered, he addressed Maggie. 'I suppose it is permissible to join you?'

'Of course,' said Miss Grey, quickly.

'I suppose so,' said the Earl, slowly.

'Tor! your mother is just starting for Bethel, or Kadesh-barnea, or some such place; it would be a graceful attention on your part to accompany her.'

'So it would be on yours! No, thank you, Master Geoff! I prefer the quiet of the Beeches, and Miss Grey's conversation.'

'She is not going to converse with you any longer. Miss Grey, will you do me the favour to ask Miss Grantham if I may come up and see her? I leave late this evening, you know, that I may be at the oar or the quill in good time to-morrow.'

Maggie smiled, nodded to him, and departed.

'Shall I warn Torchester of his mother's suspicions?' thought Trafford within himself. 'No; it would perhaps arouse dangerous associations, and do more harm than good.'

Lord Torchester lit a cigar. 'I hope you'll find Margaret in a better temper than I did this morning; she was perfectly savage. I should have given her back some of her snubs, only she looked so delicately handsome, I could not.'

'Do not let her get too much the better of you.'

'I don't intend it.'

'Her ladyship wishes to know if my lord, or you, Sir, would like to go to evening service. Miss Grantham will see Mr Trafford.'

'Miss Grey might have come back. What am *I* to do?' To the servant, 'I will come and put Lady Torchester into the carriage.' And the Earl walked away.

As the Countess descended the stairs she met Trafford going up.

'I am going to say good-bye to Margaret,' he said, in reply to her questioning look.

'Do not stay too long,' said her ladyship, coldly, and went her way, less inclined to pay profound attention to the reverend Wesleyan's utterances than she expected. 'Geoffrey closeted with Margaret! then what would Torchester and *that* Miss Grey be about?'

Meantime 'that' Miss Grey, having made her arrangements with Miss Grantham, slipped away, unperceived by any one, to a quiet little church in the near neighbourhood, where a kindly, mellow-voiced, rather old-fashioned clergyman *read* the prayers as if he were the mouthpiece of a rational congregation offering up 'a reasonable service,' instead of reducing them to an inarticulate incantation. It was very sweet to Maggie to rest there on this calm summer evening, and listen to the familiar rhythm of those dear, well-known prayers, venerable if only for the respite they have brought to many a weary, storm-shaken heart.

The evening service always transported her back to her happy, childish days, to her mother, to the dusky, solemn old cathedral of Altringham, where her love of beauty, her first dim consciousness of an inner life, quite distinct from, though not at variance with, the outer world had dawned. Was it never to be her lot to know home again? Why was it that Lady Torchester seemed averse to her remaining where she was? What was the vague, faint coldness in Miss Grantham's manner all that day and the previous evening, varied, certainly, by warm but unconnected expressions of gratitude? It was beyond her power to imagine. She only knew that directly Mr Trafford appeared upon the scene, trouble and unpleasantness were sure to find her out.

But while she listened to the hymns so sweetly sung, the prayers so devoutly read, a soft sad composure settled down upon her heart—not hope, not content, but woman's peculiar virtue, resignation.

It was not yet quite dark when Maggie came out of church, and she turned into the grounds at a small gate, of which she carried the key. It was a longer and more sombre way than by the road, out Maggie wanted to be alone; and, resting herself on one of the rustic seats with which the path was accommodated, she could not keep the tears from rising and overflowing their boundaries. She could not tell why such unusual sadness oppressed her, probably

it was in some measure the result of the great strain she had borne during Miss Grantham's illness. And now, to think any cloud should arise between her and that dear patient, who was all the dearer for the care and anxiety she had cost! 'Why does she not open her heart to me? Why does she let any one in the world come between us? I can be no obstacle to any wish of hers.' Thinking thus, Maggie rose up and hastened towards the house, intending to gain her own room and compose herself before encountering any one. Just as she reached the entrance, where the lights from the hall streamed out upon the steps, some one came up behind her quickly.

'So you returned by the grounds, Miss Grey? Hearing you had gone to church, I thought you might have no objection to an escort back; so I went up the road to meet you,' said Trafford coming to her side.

'Oh, you are very good. I do generally return by the road. Maggie was infinitely annoyed to be found with traces of tears on her cheek by Trafford. She could not avoid him; she was obliged to meet his eyes—the eyes she loved and dreaded—while the moisture still hung glistening on her own long lashes.

'What is the matter? Forgive me, but I am an old friend now. I fear some one or something has distressed you. Can I not be some help?' He bent down to her, looking eagerly into her eyes and at her trembling lips.

This encounter completed Maggie's disorganisation; she strug gled hard to steady her voice as she replied:

'You are quite mistaken; there is nothing the matter. The church was warm; the hymns—the music—the——' Her tears welled up again. 'I have been low and nervous since Miss Grantham's illness.'

'Exactly; I guessed as much,' said Trafford, standing in her way. 'Still you are not the kind of girl to cry for nothing. Will you be vexed if I write and ask your troubles?'

'For heaven's sake, no!' cried Maggie, her terror at such a proposition restoring her self-possession. 'You mean to be kind—you are kind—but I have no right to ask your help or your sympathy, nor you to know my small troubles.' Turning a little to one side, she slipped past him; but, as suddenly pausing, came back quickly, and, holding out her hand, she looked full in his face with an impulse of confidence. 'Do not think me ungrateful or ungracious,' she said, 'but I can *not* talk to you to-night.' She

drew her hand quickly from him and ran up the steps to her own room.

Trafford looked after her for a moment, and, turning away, walked slowly into the shadow of the trees in deep thought.

'Has Miss Grey not returned from church yet?' asked Miss Grantham as she was preparing to retire for the night.

'Oui, Mademoiselle, elle vient de revenir ce moment avec Monsieur qui est allé la chercher.'

'Indeed!' said Miss Grantham, and made a mental note of it.

'I am a little late,' exclaimed Maggie, entering a few minutes after; 'but it was fine and sweet. I returned by the grounds.'

'With Mr Trafford?' said Miss Grantham carelessly.

'No; I met him at the door.' Maggie was quite steady and composed now; she felt the desperate necessity of keeping herself from drifting into a dangerous nondescript liaison with Trafford which could only cause her pain and grief, and forfeit the friendship of one so dear to her as Miss Grantham, who was so ready to suspect and resent anything like friendship or familiarity with the object of her own affections.

Miss Grantham was silent for awhile; after looking earnestly at her companion, 'Maggie,' she said, 'you have been crying; have you had any bad news? What is the matter?' She spoke with her own frank, kindly voice and manner.

'There is nothing the matter, except that the service and the music this evening "struck the electric chain" and sent me back to my early days.' And Maggie, glad to be on a safe subject, spoke a little more than usual of her memories; she spoke well too, with a natural picturesqueness that interested her listener.

'Maggie,' she said, after both had dropped into silence, 'what a pity your cousin, John Grey, was not charming and loveable! It would have been such a nice wind-up for you to have married the faithful friend and champion of your troubled days.'

'Yes, I have always regretted it too,' returned Maggie, laughing; 'but it was quite impossible.'

'It was!' said Miss Grantham, gravely; 'whether you had met any one more acceptable or not?'

'I have met no one,' replied Maggie, shaking her head. 'I have certainly seen more polished people; but even had I lived in an enchanted island, I could never have made John my Ferdinand.'

Miss Grantham laughed, and then asked Maggie to read her to sleep.

The great event of the next week was that Miss Grantham once more joined the general circle at dinner. Great were the rejoicings thereat.

Of course the Earl came down from town to hand his cousin to the dining-room, and the Countess further enlivened the occasion by inviting her favourite curate, the Reverend Augustus Blakemore, at present in town for the May Meetings, as also the favoured Grantham rector, whose visit to the metropolis had reference to the Royal Academy and the archbishop's levee. Maggie was among the guests, with the Countess's full approbation. Matrimony with the Reverend Augustus would be an excellent solution of all her difficulties respecting that inconvenient young person; and whether, with the tact of his calling, the Reverend A. B. divined the wishes of his patroness, or followed the bent of his own inclinations, it is not for common-place mortals to judge, but he certainly bestowed a good deal of polite attention on the favourite companion: and Maggie was well pleased to talk with him; he was good-humoured and passably well-bred.

The Countess was content. Her son seemed quite devoted to Miss Grantham, and the Rector was kindly and patronising to her pet curate.

The next important occurrence, and very important it proved, was a visit of condolence and recognition paid by Lord Torchester and his mother to the unfortunate family solicitor.

Trafford had, for some time, been anxious that his aunt should accomplish this act of courtesy.

Mr Bolton had been on terms of unusual intimacy with his noble clients. It had been an old family connection on both sides, and, being himself a man of good birth and excellent education, Mr Bolton was quite fitted to take his part in such society.

With Trafford's father and mother he had been a great favourite. His happiest hours had been spent with them, and his affection and regard for their son was probably the deepest feeling cherished by the kindly old epicurean.

To think that he had been instrumental in his ruin was a shock too great for his nervous system to bear, and, as we have seen, he succumbed. Trafford was most desirous that he should feel the whole family exonerated him from blame, and now, as he had re-

covered sufficiently both in strength and looks to bear such a visit, Lady Torchester agreed to it.

It took place on the Saturday following, and on Sunday, returning from church, the Countess found Mr Trafford had come down from town, and given his arm to Miss Grantham in her first attempt at walking exercise.

Now Miss Grantham was dining down-stairs, the dinner party always included Miss Grey, and Trafford thought, as they took their places, that she had not yet lost the traces of the fatigue and anxiety she had undergone.

On this occasion Lady Torchester renounced the delights of the Wesleyan shepherd's discourse, and the family party, increased by the addition of Mr Longmore, who had come down to look after his vested rights in the heritage of Grantham, gathered together in the great bay window of the principal drawing-room.

'Now that you are so much better, fair cousin,' said Mr Longmore, 'I suppose you will try some further change, charming as Lady Torchester's villa is.'

'Yes,' replied Miss Grantham, 'I am thinking of Cowes for a month. There is to be a great fête at Northerland House early in July. I should like to see that, as I have missed everything else, and then I shall go abroad somewhere.'

She spoke languidly, and wore an air of much greater delicacy and weakness than when Trafford had seen her a week before.

'I think you are right,' said he, coming over to sit beside her. 'A total change of air and scene would do you a world of good. You would enjoy the Continent.'

'I am in treaty for a first-rate yacht,' said the Earl. 'Suppose you and my mother come for a cruise in the Mediterranean? We'll give Miss Grey a berth too, if she is good!'

'My dear boy,' exclaimed the Countess, 'what an idea!'

'A very good one,' said Mr Longmore, who expected an invitation. 'All the doctors recommend change of air and scene now.

'Yes,' said Trafford, 'they are routing out poor Bolton on that plea; but it does not so much matter, as he must sell his house in Connaught Square.'

'I understand he has not a shilling left,' observed Longmore.

'Not a shilling of property,' said the Earl, 'but he has a tolerable income from the firm, which is not touched by his private transactions.'

'What did you think of him yesterday?' asked Trafford.

'He is sadly altered,' replied the Countess, 'but not so bad as I expected, and altogether his frame of mind is more hopeful than I anticipated. Poor man! I feel so much for him. He seems quite to dread going away where he cannot see you, Geoffrey. It is under such circumstances that a man misses the care of a wife or daughter. As he said: "Had I a daughter now, like the young lady who was so good to me at Grantham," meaning you, Miss Grey, "I should be quite independent of the world."'

'Did he say so? poor Mr Bolton,' said Maggie, blushing, as all eyes were turned upon her.

'He has often mentioned Miss Grey to me,' remarked Trafford. 'I really wish we could find some cheerful amanuensis for him. His old servant is still with him—a very respectable fellow—but his hieroglyphics would puzzle Gardner Wilkinson himself. Now the puzzle is where to send him; one place is too far, another too cold.'

Whereupon a discussion arose on the merits of various seaside places, in the midst of which Maggie spoke a sentence or two to Miss Grantham, who immediately exclaimed:

'To be sure!—Geoffrey, have you never thought of Eastnor and Mrs Berry? I am sure she is just the person to make poor Mr Bolton comfortable.'

'Indeed! Do you think she would care to have an invalid inmate, Miss Grey!' said Trafford.

'I will write and ask her, if you wish.'

'Pray do, Miss Grey,' said the Countess, 'and let me know all about it, for I promised Mr Bolton to find some suitable locality. Indeed, I am anxious to encourage his present frame of mind, if possible.'

'You are really very good, Lady Torchester,' observed Mr Longmore.

'Thank you, my dear aunt,' said Trafford warmly, and the conversation flowed into other channels.

But early the next morning Maggie wrote the desired epistle, and received a speedy reply from Mrs Berry, whose house had been empty ever since Miss Grantham and her party had left Eastnor. She would take the best care she could of the poor dear gentleman, and if her esteemed young friend would at any time like a week or two by the sea, she would only be too happy to see her.

Lady Torchester was delighted with this letter and the terms

proposed. Having made Maggie copy out the business portion of it, she departed one brilliant morning to communicate the *trouvaille* to Mr Bolton, with a small cargo of tracts and awakening works, a basket of fruit, and a large bouquet gathered and arranged by Maggie, with the head-gardener's permission and under his superintendence.

Mr Bolton had suddenly become an object to the Countess, who was naturally a kind-hearted, if not a very sympathetic, woman. The utter annihilation of his tendency to uphold worldly and 'damnable doctrines,' which, like everything appertaining to self-assertion, had been crushed out of him by his misfortunes and illness, encouraged her ladyship to hope that a radical change had taken place, even in so hardened a sinner, and that by the application of judicious remedies she might ere long lead him captive to the feet of the Wesleyan shepherd. There is nothing so dear to the awakened soul of an evangelically pious woman than a possible convert, not yet quite converted. For him is the fatted calf, the uppermost seat, the tenderest consideration, the most flattering deference.

And this excitement is irrespective of rank and riches. Be he peasant or prince, the man who hesitates whether he will give up his previous habits of thought, and exchange his springs of action for those which move you, is an object of intense interest, especially *while* he hesitates; and there is no woman who could abstain from throwing in a make-weight of petting to turn the balance.

Lady Torchester, therefore, was thoroughly occupied with Mr Bolton, and occupied Maggie, in a voluminous correspondence with Mrs Berry, respecting various minutiæ.

Miss Grantham and her secretary sometimes laughed a little good-humouredly at her ladyship's activity. The heiress was gaining strength, but not very rapidly, and continued to pain and puzzle her friend by her variability of manner. Sometimes cold, sometimes loving, sometimes impatient, poor Maggie felt each day that the continuance of her present life was more and more uncertain.

There was much talk of Lady Torchester taking a house at Cowes, that Miss Grantham should have the benefit of sea-air and the amusement of seeing, or sailing in, the yacht which the Earl had arranged to purchase. Maggie could not help observing that nothing was said concerning herself. She was in total uncertainty whether she was to be sent to the town house, or taken with her

patroness, or dismissed; and she made up her mind to ask Miss Grantham her intentions.

But her opportunities of private communication were not so frequent as formerly. Miss Grantham was always either driving out with Lady Torchester or engaged with some friend or relative who had come down from town expressly to see her. However, Maggie resolved to make the opportunity she sought. For that purpose, she went to the drawing-room, with a letter she had just received from Mrs Berry, announcing the safe arrival of Mr Bolton, and further advising her young friend of the peculiar viands prepared for his refreshment, and the remarkable relish he had evinced for the same, &c. &c.

Lady Torchester was in possession, however, armed with a piece of Berlin wool-work. So Maggie took refuge in her letter.

'Would you care to look at it, Lady Torchester? The writing is not very legible, but I can decipher anything you cannot make out.'

'Thank you, my dear Miss Grey,' said the Countess, graciously; 'I should like to see what your friend says.'

Miss Grantham, who was pretending to crochet, looked pale and absent; she neither looked at nor spoke to Maggie.

'Very satisfactory, indeed. Could you tell me what this is?' asked Lady Torchester.

'Oh! I think it is intended for "ravenously."'

'So it is. Pray sit down, Miss Grey. Margaret and I have just been speaking about you. I see this Mrs Berry expresses a great wish to see you again. Would you like to pay her a visit?'

'Yes. That is—I really do not care much about it. Whatever Miss Grantham pleases,' said Maggie, in uncertainty, while her heart beat quickly. Was this the first move in a plan to get rid of her?

'No, dear Maggie!' cried Miss Grantham, colouring and looking up. 'It is not exactly what pleases me, but what is kindest and best to do. Lady Torchester had a talk with Mr Trafford and the Earl, on Monday, at Mr Bolton's, and they agreed, that if the poor old man is lonely and moped down at Eastnor, it will counteract all the good he might derive from going there; so it was suggested that you might go down and stay with Mrs Berry; then you could pay him a visit every day, and read to him, or anything of that kind—if I could spare you. Of course, I could spare you, though I shall miss you much; but pray do not think you are obliged to go. Do just as you like.'

'Of course, you will do just as you like,' echoed the Countess. 'But I thought it an excellent suggestion of Lord Torchester's. You see there will be no one to cheer him up. Geoffrey says it is quite out of the question that he can run down even for a day; and I think it is an opportunity of doing good to a fellow-creature which ought not to be lost.'

'I am sure, Lady Torchester, I shall be very pleased to be of any use to Mr Bolton. I shall be very pleased to go down and stay at Eastnor, if Miss Grantham wishes it.' Maggie had collected her forces, and rapidly reviewed her position. Moreover, there was something in Miss Grantham's kind, natural manner, that revived her courage.

'Thank you, Maggie,' replied that lady, with a pleasant smile, 'and it will do you good also. You must want change, after all you have gone through for me. Why, you will be glad not to see me for a little while?'

'Glad, not to see *you!* Ah! Miss Grantham——' Maggie stopped abruptly and eloquently.

'Pray, can you tell me,' asked the Countess, who had been counting the stitches in a parrot's beak, with which she was elaborately decorating a large square of canvas—'Pray, can you tell me if the gospel is preached at Eastnor?'

As Miss Grantham remained silent, Maggie thought herself bound to reply: 'There is a very High Church there,' she said, a little timidly, for it was a portentous subject, 'where there was a great deal of very ridiculous ceremony; but I remember going to an Independent chapel, or some Dissenting chapel, a little white-washed place in the fisher village; and I was very much struck with the sermon, and the service altogether; it gave me more the idea of a "whole congregation worshipping God," than any I had ever seen; they seemed to sing and pray with all their hearts.'

'My dear Miss Grey!' cried Lady Torchester, laying down her work, 'I am very pleased to hear you speak in this way. I feared that you were infected by that spirit of lukewarmness and unbelief too common to the young in the present day. I am more than ever anxious that you should be with our afflicted friend, and I trust you will lose no opportunity of pressing the truth upon him.'

'Maggie is the most religious girl I know,' said Miss Grantham, with a bright approving smile. 'Well, you had better write to Mrs Berry, and make your arrangements. We are going to Cowes

next week, and when I have settled my plans for the summer you can join me again.'

'And you had better mention to Mrs Berry,' said the elder and more thoughtful lady, 'that we do not want to quarter you upon her to suit our convenience; that although nominally a visitor, she must consider you as a boarder. You will settle all that, and let me know; pray let it be clear and defined.'

Feeling half stupefied by the sudden and unexpected manner in which she was 'told off for detachment duty,' Maggie retired to collect her thoughts and to write.

Having written and despatched her letter, Maggie sat on, trying to understand why Miss Grantham was so ready to part with her. Though Mr Bolton's sincere admiration had always made him a pet with Miss Grantham, Maggie was well aware she would not have sacrificed so much of comfort as seemed to depend on herself, had not some other motive been at work.

She was very pleased to go and see Mrs Berry; very glad to be of use to Mr Bolton; but both feelings were tinged by a gnawing, painful impression that she would never again be with Miss Grantham on the same happy footing. That this separation was only the preliminary to one more painful and more permanent.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

When money is no object, obstacles melt rapidly, and very Alps of circumstances dissolve in a wonderful manner.

Mrs Berry wrote in such unmistakable joy at the prospect of her young friend's visit, that her orthography, syntax, and prosody were, to use one of her own expressions, 'all in a muddle.'

'It is just the best thing Mr Bolton's friends could do for him to send you down. It makes me quite in a fidget to see the dear old gentleman sitting there without nothing to do; and his man, Thomas, a nice, civil-spoken, respectable person as you would like to see, can't read well. I tried once or twice, but they do put such 'orrid hard words in the papers, and my throat gets that dry and

ticklish, that what with smothering a cough and trying to read distinct I thought I would have choked. You see Mr Bolton can read a little while, and then he turns giddy. He is out a good deal, and has his meals regular, and that helps on pretty well, but the evenings *is* tedious. I have had rather a fright lately. The milkman told my Sarah there was a foreign-looking swell at the *Ship Hotel* inquiring for me; and I thought it must be the Count—regular cleaned out, and coming to see what he could pick up—so I was afraid to go outside the doors, till one morning who should go by but Kockanowska, the Pole, as used to smash my piano every Wednesday evening in Paris—the money that I have paid repairing after him would keep a poor family! Well, with that I got my bonnet on and went out, and I soon stumbled on my gentleman. He was very bad off, and was wanting to set up as a professor of the piano. He wanted *me* to recommend him to Miss Monitor—the grand school at Sea-view House—but I just told him I would do nothing of the sort; that I had had enough of the Count and his followers, and that I would be more like to denounce him as a gambler; so he is gone. He couldn't, or wouldn't, tell me anything of the Count; but, anyhow, this house and furniture is my trustee's, not mine, so he could not do me much harm.

'I am so pleased to think of seeing you; try and come down Tuesday next at latest.'

This letter, with all its imperfections on its head, was shown to Miss Grantham, because of certain business arrangements contained in the first page. She smiled good-humouredly over it, and then exclaimed, 'It must have been a dreadful task, Maggie, to be companion to such an ignorant woman.'

'No, somehow it was not, and yet she was very selfish; but I was really of value to her, and felt it, so I grew positively fond of her.'

'I cannot understand it,' said Miss Grantham. 'I must ask Lady Torchester,' she continued, 'to settle about our leaving for Cowes on Monday or Tuesday. I could not bear to stay here after you are gone. I shall miss you terribly, Maggie.'

'Then why do you send me away?' cried Maggie, with an irresistible impulse, her eyes filling up. 'I know I have displeased or annoyed you in some way! It would be kinder to tell me so at once than let me fret and puzzle over it as I do. Is it, really and truly, only to make Mr Bolton comfortable that you send me away?'

'My dear girl, why will you torment yourself?' began Miss

Grantham, in a slightly constrained manner, and looking down; then she hesitated, and, raising her eyes quickly to her friend, exclaimed, 'There, I cannot tell *you* polite stories! There is a little something fretting me, though you are not the least to blame. I cannot solve the riddle for you now, and you must not ask me. When we meet again I shall probably tell you everything; but for the present we had better part; but do not fear, my friendship for you will not and shall not be shaken. You are true as steel, and, besides, I can never forget. Don't look miserable, Maggie; we shall be better friends than ever when we meet again;' and she held out her hand.

'*When* we meet,' said Maggie, with a half-sob, as she pressed and kissed the hand held out to her. 'I feel as if we shall never be together again as we are now.' And, unable to regain composure, she hastily left the room.

During the days which intervened Miss Grantham was very tender in her manner, and considerate, but she evidently never wavered for a moment in her intention to expel poor Maggie, for a while at least, from the paradise of her presence. Lady Torchester, too, was most benign, and Maggie could not help thinking, with a smile, that the exceeding amiability of every one was rather like *les derniers moments d'une condamnée.*

Lord Torchester was the only one who did not seem quite content with the arrangement.

'Capital thing for old Bolton; but what will you do without Miss Grey, Margaret?'

'Oh! I must try and manage. But, Tor, was it not you who suggested her going down to Eastnor?'

'Me? No; certainly not. It was between my mother and Geoffrey Trafford.'

'Was it? I thought you were the originator? What has become of Geoff? he has not been here for ten days.'

'I don't know. He is busy, I suppose. He says he will come down and see us at Cowes. He is, or used to be, a first-rate seaman.'

And Maggie, too, wondered and regretted a little that Mr Trafford did not come to the Beeches; that he had never made the most distant approach to a private conversation since the Sunday evening she had broken so abruptly from him.

Sometimes she wished she had not; was it not prudery and bad taste in her to avoid what was probably only his friendly, kindly

wish to sympathise, and, if possible, to assist her if she wanted assistance. If she had consented to let him write, what would he have written? It was, of course, much better not to receive a letter from him. Miss Grantham would have divined that she had one the moment she looked in her face, and all sorts of mischief would have ensued; still Maggie was a little surprised he had not written. She was not aware how fervent was her exclamation, 'For heaven's sake, no!' when Trafford suggested such a proceeding.

At all events he did not write, and Maggie was at once relieved, and the least little bit disappointed. She had quite given up all the stormy struggling with which she used to tear her brave little heart. Do what she would, this man had so entwined himself with her inner life that she could fight against the idea no longer.

Yet was this no ignoble defeat—no folding of the hands in helplessness. She would be as active as she could be, as diligent in self-culture, and time would gradually dim the outlines now so vivid and so dear. He should never know this folly—no, he should never have a glimpse of it—though he understood her alarmingly well. But what was his knowledge compared to her intense comprehension of him? There was not a glance of his eye, tender, or impatient, or scornful, not a gesture, not an attitude, not an inflection of his voice, the tones of which were so well trained and guarded, that did not betray to her the movements of his mind which she read by the light of an affection, pure, deep, and discriminating as ever lodged in mortal heart; and hidden almost from her own eye, lay the conviction that at all events he had some feeling beyond common liking and esteem for herself, though not enough to make him bridge over the wide space between their social positions. But he had never trifled with her—never shown the smallest want of respect for her; and it was this quiet, undemonstrative self-control that had so deeply impressed her.

Thinking vaguely in this strain, and telling herself that at Eastnor there was little or no chance of being disturbed by a visit from Mr Trafford, Maggie performed her packing up.

With a few tears and a hearty embrace she parted with Miss Grantham, not caring to own how sad a presentiment of separation weighed upon her. Lady Torchester and the fair invalid were to start the same afternoon for Cowes, escorted by the Earl; while Maggie proposed to sleep at P—— Square, in order to gather

together all her belongings; for by some curious impulse of that prophetic current which runs through us all—just making darkness visible, but seldom or never offering light enough to guide—she felt impelled to carry her all with her to Mrs Berry's, lest she might never return.

Eastnor looked quite a different place under a June sun and a bright blue sky, and Maggie felt a newer and a brighter creature after a night's rest. She was most heartily welcomed by Mrs Berry.

'I am sure you have the most wonderful luck, Maggie! To think how kind all these grand people are to you; I can't help thinking you will bring some to me. You ought, you know; but I must say you are looking regular wore out.' So spake Mrs Berry the next morning, as the two ladies sat at breakfast. 'What a mercy it was Miss Grantham got over that fever! we wouldn't have a season at all, if it had gone out that she caught her death at Eastnor. Do you think she had named you in her will?'

'I never thought of such a thing; I don't suppose she has ever made one.'

'Well, she ought to; and put you down for a good round sum, after all your devotion to her at the risk of your life?'

'How do you know I risked my life?'

'Didn't the old gentleman upstairs tell me all about it? He is uncommon fond of a bit of gossip, and is never tired of hearing about Lord Torchester and Mr Trafford, and their goings on in Paris. Lord, Maggie, I never seem to have known what grandees they are, till I heard this old gentleman, who is like a nobleman in a small way himself, talk of them so respectful-like. Tell me what's gone wrong with him, Maggie? Something about money matters—that's at the bottom of everything. Not but what I must say Mr Bolton is quite the gentleman in his ways and dealings—quite liberal.'

'Oh! he was very rich; but he lost all his money in that terrible "Bank failure," Oldham and Garret, when Mr Trafford lost all his.'

'What! has Trafford lost all his money? Well, I am sorry! For a more gentlemanly, polite, pleasant creature I never met; and ever since the night of that concert, when your poor cousin came down here, I can't help fancying that he is sweet upon you, Maggie.'

'Mrs Berry! How can you fancy such nonsense! such injurious nonsense. It is infinitely annoying to me to hear you speak like that.'

'Well, no harm's done. You need not colour like fire about it, but them's my notions. Now, will you have another cup of tea?

'No, thank you; and, Mrs Berry, have you nothing for me to do? I am longing to be busy. Can I not make up your books, or your bonnets, or something?'

'Law! Maggie, do you mean to say you are ready to go to the old work again for me, now that you are a paying boarder? Well, you are a trump, and no mistake!'

'Ah!' cried Maggie, rising and going to the back of her chair, where she pressed a light kiss on Mrs Berry's brow, 'nothing can obliterate old times with me. Do I not owe my first emancipation to you? Can I forget the dear, delightful days in Paris, and all your kindness to me there? Why, at the remembrance, I feel equal to manage an ocean of lace, and an infinitude of ribbon.'

Mrs Berry wiped her eyes. 'Don't talk of Paris, my dear,' she said. 'I made a bad business of it there; and I must say you always warned me. Still, if those vile women had let the poor Count alone—but that is neither here nor there! the best thing you can do for me now is to make yourself agreeable to poor Mr. Bolton, and keep him here, for he is a good tenant. I'll just step up and say you have come to pay me a visit, and will be happy to read to him, or anything.'

'Do; and I will not write to Miss Grantham till I have seen him.'

Mrs Berry's ground-floor consisted of a cheerful drawing-room, the windows of which commanded the most picturesque view of old Eastnor; its irregular red-tiled roofs, the fishing-boats dotting the bay or drawn up on the beach, the richly-tinted deep brown and black nets hung out to dry, and the sheltering crag beforementioned; behind it was another drawing-room converted into a bed-room for the invalid.

Between these two apartments the once active, self-asserting, and somewhat dominant man of business now passed his life There, while the full tide of the world poured on, brimming, seething, ceaseless, with its everlasting rush and roar, he, poor shattered shred, that so lately shouldered it with the foremost, now lay motionless and stranded; with the sense of failure, of mistaken judgment, pressing on his slowly-awakening brain; and,

worse than all, the consciousness of having dragged down his favourite client with him. He terribly missed the friendly visits of that sufferer; his reassuring presence, his cheerful, easy talk, was more to him than any doctor's remedy.

When Maggie, on receiving a cordial invitation, entered the room, she was much touched by the alteration in her former acquaintance.

He was neither looking so ill, nor was he so disfigured as she expected. His mouth was very slightly drawn to one side, scarcely perceptible till he spoke or smiled. But it was in the whole expression of face and figure that she perceived the change. He sat so still in his invalid-chair, there was a sort of hopeless quiet in his attitude; his right hand lay in a sling, the left rested on a small table, which, with his chair, occupied a bay window. The once keen, defiant black eyes had a pained, wistful look; and though neat and well cared for, there was a limpness about him that showed some power had departed, never to return.

He smiled and held out his left hand as Maggie approached. 'Very glad to see you; very good of you to come.'

His voice was thicker and slower than formerly, but was not otherwise changed.

'And I am so pleased to see you, Mr Bolton. I shall be so glad if you will let me read to you, or do anything for you as you used at Grantham.'

And Maggie drew a chair beside him. There was a warm underglow of kindness and tender consideration toning her quiet manner, like the tinge of rose that gives such a delightful richness to certain neutral greys and fawn colours. Poor Mr Bolton felt it very keenly. A sudden gentle life seemed to flow round him; a moral Gulf Stream, bringing warmth and vitality from happier climates.

'And what has brought you down here, my dear young lady?'

'Oh! I was a little worn out after all my anxiety about Miss Grantham, and they thought change would do me good, so I came down to my old friend Mrs Berry,'

'A very pleasant arrangement for me. I suspect that best of fellows, Mr Trafford, is at the bottom of it. He said how good it would be if I had such a nurse as Miss Grantham had, and then we talked of all your kind attention to me at Grantham. Depend upon it, it was his suggestion. Rather too bad to send you from one invalid to another.'

'Nothing suits me better. And you are scarce an invalid. You want a companion, not a nurse. I am a companion by profession.

Are the morning papers in yet? You must set me to work at once.'

'They are not come, and I want to hear your news. Tell me about Miss Grantham, and the Earl, and Mr Trafford.'

The family had a supreme interest in Mr Bolton's eyes, and half an hour quickly passed in a description of Miss Grantham's illness, recovery, removal to the Beeches, the renewal of her intercourse with Trafford, &c. Maggie soon perceived the family adviser's anxiety on this last-named subject, and saw that the old man proudly reckoned on a brilliant marriage retrieving his favourite's fortune.

Then the papers came; and when Mr Bolton's dinner was brought he was astonished to find that the morning, usually so long and tedious and sad, was gone, almost too fast.

After three or four days it seemed to Mr Bolton, Mrs Berry, and indeed to Maggie, that she had been installed for ages as chief companion, prime mover and prime counsellor, and that in uprooting her the whole edifice of their daily life must tumble about their ears.

It was many a long year since she had been so busy and so happy. From her early rising to her regular half-past ten retiring, she had not an idle moment for vain or morbid regrets.

Mrs Berry's accounts had to be looked into, and sundry matters of ornamentation in the house and furniture had to be attended to, and her own needlework, besides all she did for Mr Bolton and a precious hour or two of reading for herself, which she managed to abstract from every evening. Then she was thoroughly free of the house. From 'turret to foundation-stone' she could come and go as she liked. Mrs Berry admired her young friend's success too entirely to be anything save an acquiescent auxiliary. So the delicious home feeling grew upon Maggie, and though she often thought of Miss Grantham, and wished she would write more frequently, she could not help acknowledging to herself that she had never known anything like the content and repose she now enjoyed, under the brilliant auspices of the beautiful heiress.

Nevertheless Miss Grantham did not neglect her. She wrote short but kindly notes, from which it appeared she was very well amused at Cowes, and Lady Torchester wrote long exordiums direct to the patient, which Mr Bolton answered judiciously with Maggie's help and by Maggie's hand.

He often received letters from Mr Trafford, and loved to speak

of him during their long talks in the bay window, or on the beach, where he was daily wheeled, and used to sit enjoying the delicious briny air, talking lazily while Maggie worked, or listening while she read, or both remaining sympathetically silent.

'My dear,' said the old gentleman one day, after having kept a long silence, 'it is very curious. At one time I should have thought that two days of such a life as I now lead would have been enough to kill me with misery and mortification; and now I have come to this I should be happy were I only free from the consciousness of having ruined Mr Trafford. Yes, I was very successful, and knew all that sort of pleasure. But I don't think I was ever so happy as I am now.'

'I am so glad to hear you say so; and I do not think you need fret about Mr Trafford. He seems quite energetic and hopeful. Perhaps he will do better now than he ever would have done without the incentive of necessity.'

'Ah, that does not alter the case to me! But I trust he will marry Miss Grantham, and that will set everything right. You have seen them a good deal together, my dear. Do you not think it is the most likely termination of matters?'

Maggie shook her head. 'I am no great judge,' she said. 'But I do not fancy Mr Trafford thinks of her.'

'Pooh, nonsense!' replied Mr Bolton, with some of his old quick decision; 'he must. Maggie, you must write for me to Mr Trafford this evening. He has hitherto been content with what meagre reports my good Thomas has been able to send him; but in his last two letters he has begged me to use your hand.'

'Very well, Mr Bolton. Very quietly said, but how quickly beat the heart under its light muslin covering! She had always half expected, half dreaded this; and now she was almost sorry it had come, she had been so tranquil, so content.

'I fear there is no chance of our seeing him here,' continued Mr Bolton. 'He is attending the Court very closely, and when the long vacation comes I think, from what he told me, he is going away to some leafy retreat in Wales to fish.'

When they returned to the house Mr Bolton did not forget his intentions, as he often did. So Maggie was obliged to produce the writing materials, while her companion dictated an epistle to Mr Trafford. Short, but full of matter, it described his own comfort, content, and improvement; the great pleasure which Mr Trafford's letters gave him; and then he would fain have proceeded with

a glowing panegyric on his fair secretary, but she laughingly refused.

'It would be absurd to send my own praises in my own handwriting,' she said. 'Mr Trafford would be the first to laugh at me.'

'Well, he has heard them from Thomas, so I shall let you off. Give me the paper and I will manage to sign it.'

That afternoon came a letter from Miss Grantham, full of many kind inquiries, and giving an amusing account of their first cruise in Lord Torchester's yacht. At the end she added, 'Have you seen or heard anything of Geoff Trafford? He has never turned up here, and I begin to fear he is irretrievably lost to civilisation.'

To which Maggie replied duly the next day, stating that nothing had been seen and very little heard of Mr Trafford at Eastnor, and quoting Mr Bolton's opinion touching his intended retirement to Wales. It was a considerable time before Miss Grantham wrote again, and Maggie sometimes reproached herself that she had not told her patroness that she had written to Mr Trafford for Mr Bolton. However, she gradually came to think it was as well she had not.

The next morning's post brought her a letter from Aunt Grey, which was a most unusual occurrence, though Maggie wrote dutifully and regularly.

Aunt Grey's epistle was pervaded by her usual spirit of exaltation for self, and depreciation for her neighbours. Business at Ditton Market was on the whole prosperous; but what 'your uncle would do without me I am sure I cannot tell. However, young Banks is a great help—quite a rising young man; and between you and me I think he is as good as engaged to Jemima. There is a very steady young man, who has a nice bit of land a few miles off, visits here very constant. It's my belief that he is after Bell, who has grown a fine girl, and might be any man's fancy. My girls, you see, are plain and straightforward; no pretending to be fine ladies—no airs and nonsense about *them*, and that's what men like. Your uncle had a letter from John last week. They had a fine voyage, and he writes in the best of spirits. His letter is just full of Polly right through. She quite enjoys herself, and is so well. He does not make any mention of you. We don't quite understand you being sent back to Mrs Berry. It looks uncommon like Miss Grantham trying to get rid of you, which seems ungrateful after you nursing her through that horrid fever. Why, your uncle

was quite foolish about you when he heard of it, but the selfishness of people is surprising.'

Maggie smiled as she replaced this effusion in its envelope, and resumed her occupation of trimming a wide-brimmed hat to shelter her from the embrowning effect of her long rambles beside Mr Bolton's chair. Nevertheless the letter pained her. She knew Miss Grantham did not want to get rid of her, and she did not in the least value Mrs Grey's opinion, yet she did not like to see the hard conjecture set down in unmistakable caligraphy; and John, too, he might have asked how and where she was, without any disloyalty to Polly.

However, she threw off the impression, and devoted herself to her hat. 'Though it is a common thing I may as well make it pretty;' and accordingly she fastened a knot of grey ribbons, matching the colour of the straw, to the side, and finding a small surplus of the material, left two long floating ends. Having accomplished this, she tried it on before the little mirror which adorned the mantelpiece in Mrs Berry's private parlour, and surveyed her work with some admiration.

'Please 'm,' said the servant coming in, 'Mrs Berry says this letter is for you. I took it to her in mistake, for you see her name is on it.'

Maggie removed her hat, and sat down to examine the letter. It was directed to Miss Grey, at Mrs Berry's; but the writing, large, firm, and very distinct, made her heart give a sudden bound. She had seen very little of it, yet it was well known. What a silly thing she was to be so disturbed! It was, no doubt, something for Mr Bolton, or about him. She must read it before the old man sent for her, as he usually did about eleven o'clock.

'My dear Miss Grey,—Although your stern and emphatic prohibition as to my presuming to write to you is still fresh in my memory, I cannot resist sending a few words of reproach for your unfriendliness in not adding one syllable of separate comment or information to Bolton's letters. When I recognised a different hand from that of the accomplished Thomas (my correspondent hitherto), I tore open the envelope, feeling sure that I should find a joint epistle. But no! I read diligently every line—I studied every defiant angle of the resolute and characteristic writing, but it was Bolton all through.

'Considering the sincere interest I take in our friend's condition,

to say nothing of my old friendship with yourself, I think you might have added a postscript. I write by this post to Mr Bolton, and, in replying, I really do hope you will give me your candid opinion of him.

'If you will add how you like the banishment to which I believe I was instrumental in consigning you, and any other particulars you may choose, you will be conferring a favour. You cannot think how refreshing such a letter would be in the arid solitudes of Gray's Inn. Town is fearfully hot, and dusty, and seedy—every one looks the worse of the season; but, as Bolton will tell you, I cannot get away for a week or more. I never longed so much for sea air before. What an astonishing zest a spice of difficulty lends! I count on my holiday with a schoolboy's delight. How are you off for books at Eastnor? I will send you some reviews and novels—novels are the correct thing on the sea-shore. I suppose the newspaper is as much as you can read to Bolton. Are you bored? Do you regret the Beeches and Miss Grantham, and can you forgive me for being the means of separating you from her? Remember, I expect replies to all these questions, because—well, because I wish for them. Moreover, you owe me large reparation for having visited the sins of that charming traitress, Madame de Beaumanoir, on me.

'So for every reason you must write, especially as I want your absolution for writing myself.

'Always yours,
'G. TRAFFORD.'

Absolve him! Well, if he could have seen the sparkling eyes that scanned his lines—the trembling hand that held his letter—he would not have had much doubt. But it was with pleasure and dread, mingled with a fluttered exultation, that Maggie read his ingenuous epistle. She must not allow herself to be blinded to the danger of being drawn into an intimacy which must be concealed from Miss Grantham; and while confused ideas of prudence and pleasure crowded her brain, the respectable Thomas put in his head to request that, if quite disengaged, she would come to Mr Bolton.

She found that gentleman quite animated, with an open letter before him. 'Well, my dear young lady, I have some correspondence to trouble you with to-day. Here is a most charming, entertaining letter from Mr Trafford, and a parcel of books, which he says is for your benefit as well as mine. And what do you think? He has had his first brief, and absolutely spoken in Court.'

'Is it possible!' cried Maggie, with the warmest sympathy.

'Yes. I am happy to say he has got his foot on the first round of the ladder.'

'Then depend on it you will see him at the top before you quit this mortal scene, dear Mr Bolton.'

'I hope so—I hope so. Thomas, just bring the paper. Look in the law reports—Court of Chancery—Jackson *versus* Jones.'

'Will his speech be in the paper?' cried Maggie, delighted.

'I do not fancy he made much of a speech;—but have you found it?'

'Yes—here it is. It is a long thing about minors, and no one seems to speak. Oh, here are the names—for the plaintiff, Serjeant Pouncebox; with him, Mr G. Trafford.'

'That's it. Just read the case, will you?'

After dinner Mr Bolton dictated a long letter to his friend, from which Maggie gathered that Mr Trafford was kept in town in consequence of some business connected with the unfortunate bank; and that Mr Bolton was very anxious that as soon as he possibly could he should go down to Cowes and join the heiress and her party.

'Miss Grantham is to be in town early in July, for some grand fête,' said Maggie, as she finished her task.

'Is she? But Mr Trafford is sure to be aware of her movements.'

Maggie, blushing at her own duplicity, offered to post Mr Bolton's letter. She could not bring herself to say that she too had heard from Trafford. However imprudent she might be in concealing it, she could *not* tell Mr Bolton or Mrs Berry.

So she ran away to her own room, and indited a shy little postscript—principally about Mr Bolton. She was able to give an excellent account of him. She was very happy at Eastnor, happier than she had been for a long time.

She was charmed to receive the books, and greatly obliged to Mr Trafford. She would always add a bulletin of Mr Bolton if he wished it. She was so pleased to hear the news in his letter to Mr Bolton, and offered her best wishes.

'Very guarded—very commonplace,' she thought; 'so, perhaps, he will see I do not wish him to write again. Heigho!'

So she posted the letter, and things fell into their usual routine. Nor did Trafford write again.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WELL, I'm sure it has been quite like another world since you came down,' said Mrs Berry, as she with Maggie were enjoying their five o'clock tea; for Mr Bolton generally slept at that time in order to be fresh and ready for his evening airing.

'Take some marmalade, Maggie. How long is it since you came down? Five weeks next Tuesday—so it is; and it seems no time at all. Mr Bolton says he feels like a new man. He is pretty sure to stay on as long as you are here. I hope Miss Grantham won't be sending for you.

'I do not think she will,' replied Maggie, with a slight sigh, 'she seems to have forgotten me; it is quite ten days since I wrote to her.'

'Well, if I was you, Maggie,' said Mrs Berry oracularly, 'I should never trouble about that. Your best plan would be to stick to the old gentleman up-stairs. Miss Grantham will be marrying some day soon; very likely she and that Trafford have made it up by this time, and then you will be sent adrift. Now Mr Bolton will be like a father to you, and leave you his money when he dies.'

'But I do not think he has any money to leave. He lost it all when Mr Trafford lost his, in that terrible failure.'

'Don't you believe all that! He pays like a prince, and as regular—as regular as the sun. Depend upon it he had a nest-egg put away snug. There is no being up to those lawyers. He is a lawyer, is he not?'

'Yes; still I am quite sure he lost his fortune.'

'Don't tell me you are sure. I'll never believe it. And I can't help thinking how nice it would be if you was to stay on, and him, summer and winter. If you wanted to go away for an out I could take care of him; and if I wanted to go you could take care of the house. You see, if he thinks you stick to him, though he *has* lost his money, he'll be twice as fond of you. Has he any relations?'

'I do not know anything about his family.'

'Relations is a bore,' said Mrs Berry, reflectively. 'They are always in the way when they aren't wanted, and out of the way

when they are. But my advice is, stick to Mr Bolton and keep him here. He can't be doing no business now; and where could he be better off?'

'Nowhere, indeed. Still, if he gets stronger, I do not fancy he will keep away from London.'

'I wouldn't mind going back there myself if I could part with this house advantageously. But law, Maggie! you try to fix yourself on to some one. You have had wonderful luck so far, but still you have nothing really settled. Ah! you threw away your best chance when you let your cousin go! I never could quite make that out. Did you like any one else better, or did you think there was any chance of the Earl coming on again?'

'Oh, no! dear Mrs Berry. Can you imagine my simply objecting to marry any one until I found some one I really could like?'

'Mark my words, Maggie, you will be an old maid. There,' interrupting herself, 'Sarah! The front door bell! It will be some one after my two top rooms; I thought I saw a gentleman come up the steps. It's really cruel to think the chances one has, letting apartments; and all no good because I am tied to that unfortunate, misguided, treacherous scapegrace! Why, Sarah has come down again. What is it, Sarah?'

'A gentleman for Mr Bolton, 'm.'

'A gentleman for Mr Bolton! Is it Mr Parkins?'—this was the incumbent of St Winifred's.

'No, 'm; it's a stranger—a tall, dark gentleman.'

'My goodness gracious! It's that Trafford, Maggie; come to stir up everything! I should not wonder but he is after the old gentleman's money. I wish he would just stay away.'

'I do not think it can be Mr Trafford,' exclaimed Maggie, turning quite pale. 'Mr Bolton did not in the least expect him.'

'I'll lay anything it is. Here, Sarah; just ask Thomas who it is when he comes out, and if he wants any dinner.'

In a few minutes Sarah returned. 'It's Mr Trafford, 'm, and he does not want any dinner; he had some at the hotel.'

'There now! I told you so! And there will be an end of our peace and comfort.'

'I hope not,' said Maggie, who felt a strong desire to run away. 'Mrs Berry, you said you wanted some of the green ribbon matched for your muslin dress; I may as well go and get it for you now—of course, Mr Bolton will not want me.'

'Oh! do as you like; perhaps it will be better to get on with it when you can.'

Maggie speedily departed on her errand, too disturbed to think very distinctly at first; but the prosaic employment of matching the ribbon helped to clear her brain. So she made a *détour*, during which her mind grew calmer and her pulses steadier. She would not seem to avoid Mr Trafford, nor reject his well-intended professions of friendship, but she would really keep away from him as much as possible; and also, if possible, never mention Paris or the de Beaumanoir imbroglio. It was quite foolish to be disturbed because of so natural an event as Mr Trafford's coming to see his invalid friend. She must be perfectly self-possessed, and treat it as a matter of course.

Thus fortified, Maggie returned; but did not reach the house till past seven.

'Where on earth have you been?' cried Mrs Berry, who met her in the hall. 'Mr Bolton has been asking for you, and Mr Trafford, and I have been in to see them; and I'm sure if Miss Grantham does marry Trafford I am not surprised. A nicer man never walked! He is quite delighted with Mr Bolton—he never saw such a recovery; and said out plain enough that the best thing the old gentleman could do was to stay where he was well off! What do you think of that?' Mrs Berry was radiant.

'Very sensible indeed.'

'There, go—get off your hat and make yourself tidy. They have asked for tea, and you'd best go in and make it.'

'But I do not suppose Mr Bolton can want me.'

'He does, I tell you. Don't be aggravating and contradictory.'

Maggie made no further objection, but removed her hat and smoothed her hair; and, arming herself with her never-failing needlework, entered the 'enchanted hall' without giving herself time for more hesitation.

Mr Bolton was in his usual place by the window. Trafford was sitting by the table with the newspaper in his hand, as if he had been reading it aloud. Thomas was laying the tea-things.

'Where have you been, my dear? I have asked a dozen times for you?'

'Doing a little shopping—as I did not think you would want me.'

Trafford had stood up as she came in, and looked at her with a pleased half-smile while Mr Bolton spoke.

'Well, Miss Grey; you see I could not refrain from running down to see how my prescription agreed with our patient here. And really the effect is marvellous.' He shook hands with her very cordially.

'I am very glad you are satisfied,' said Maggie, and placed herself at the tea-table. With all her resolution, she felt strangely shy and embarrassed.

'You are not perhaps aware of all you have to thank me for,' continued Trafford, addressing Bolton. 'It was due to my dexterous manœuvres that you have been blessed with Miss Grey's companionship. I put it into Lady Torchester's head to apply to Miss Grantham; but I was desperately afraid she would refuse.'

Maggie shook her head a little sadly. 'I fear she did not care enough to refuse,' she said in a low voice.

'We will discuss that by-and-by,' said Trafford in the same tone.

While Mr Bolton, who did not catch the asides, was saying, 'You may laugh if you like, Mr Trafford, but Maggie has been a blessing to me. The kindest, wisest little companion that could have been sent to a poor old fellow thrown on his beam ends like myself.'

'Laugh!' exclaimed Trafford, with much earnestness, 'I meant what I said. Your opinion is an article of faith with me, of which Miss Grey is quite aware.'

'If you are both going to persist in such barefaced panegyrics,' said Maggie, rallying herself from her confusion, and laughing and blushing very prettily, 'I shall run away and leave you to pour out your own tea.'

'Heaven forbid!' cried Trafford piously. 'We will not breathe another syllable of praise. Thank you,' as he received his cup. 'I think the last time you had the pleasure of pouring out tea for me was in Paris, under poor Mrs Berry's auspices. What an unfortunate affair that marriage of hers was.'

'Do you know I think Mrs Berry is really happier now than when she was running after imaginary grand people in Paris. She must be, for she is fully and congenially employed; and after all, that must be nearly all that is necessary.'

'Not a bad definition of happiness—eh, Bolton? but just a little more completes it.'

'What more?' asked Mr Bolton, who was enjoying his tea by the open window.

'Well, congenial companionship as well as employment, that supplies the whole of what is necessary in your estimation, does it not, Miss Grey?'

'Yes,' said Maggie, with a little faint sigh.

The evening went over with marvellous, charming rapidity. The invalid was wheeled out on the sands, and both his friends accompanied him. There was something contagious in the sort of controlled joyousness that seemed to glow through Trafford's manner and rang out in his voice. He did the principal part of the talking, and amused his listeners by a description of his experiences in court, which highly delighted Mr Bolton.

The air was delicious; the sunset hues divine; the ripple forward and soft caressing backward sweep of the wavelets, sweetest music. But at last Mr Bolton decided to return to the house. It had been, he said, a very happy day, but he was tired, and bid Trafford and Maggie good night as they went in.

'Come, Miss Grey, the evening is heavenly; take one turn more on the beach before you imprison yourself for the night. Consider, I am only free for a couple of days; you ought to indulge me a little; besides, I want to talk about Miss Grantham.'

'Very well,' said Maggie; and they walked slowly away down the garden. Right or wrong it was very delightful. No one was there to find fault or notice the unorthodox proceeding.

'I imagine,' said Trafford, after a long, delicious silence, 'that you think Miss Grantham was too ready to part with you?'

'I thought more of it when I first came down here. I am in a more healthy frame of mind now.'

'I rather think yours an unusually healthy mind; but you are mistaken if you think Margaret is not fondly attached to you. She is, and yet it is possible she may wound you. Do not, however, let that distress you. She is too true herself not to love you, and when you meet again you will be better friends than ever. Why, you saved her life.'

'Still love—I mean affection—cannot be bought. Neither gold nor self-sacrifice avail much.'

'What can win love, then?' asked Trafford in a low tone.

'Oh, I cannot tell. I feel inclined to ask you, and then practise the spell on Miss Grantham. I do want her to love me as if we were equals, for equality is the soul of love and friendship.'

'That was always your doctrine, and I believe it has much truth.'

'I am sure of it.'

'And—forgive me if I speak too freely—do you never give any regretful thoughts to poor Torchester?'

'Never. I like him very much, but I have never regretted not taking advantage of his boyish fancy. I should not have been happy. You could not imagine me a countess.'

'Yes, I could,' said Trafford, with a gay laugh, 'a very charming little countess; but I would rather not.'

'Of course I know that,' returned Maggie, laughing also. He was so frank and pleasant and unloverlike that she was growing delightfully at home with him. She did not notice that he turned and looked steadily at her, for she herself was watching the first moonbeams gleaming out over the smooth sea.

'How did you like the books I sent you?' was his next question.

'Very much—especially an article in that review on "French and English fiction." The writer knows women wonderfully. It seemed to me as if he knew every thought of mine, my courage and cowardice—everything. Is it not wonderful a man could write like this?—for I suppose it was written by a man.'

'I am glad it pleased you; very glad; for I am rather interested in the writer. Have you heard from Miss Grantham lately?'

'No, not for a fortnight.'

'She is to be in town on Monday, I think, for some fête or entertainment; and I am sorry to hear that Sir Hugh Erskine has been hanging about her at Cowes.'

'So am I. I cannot bear Sir Hugh. But, Mr Trafford, I must go in, and you would like a cigar; so good-night: we are close to the garden-gate.'

'Must you go? Well, good-night.'

It was perhaps inadvertence, but he held her hand rather too long for the preservation of that calm, equable condition of friendship which she flattered herself she had been successful in attaining.

'Gracious goodness, Maggie! did you go out again, and have you been walking till this hour—just nine o'clock—with Mr Trafford? If Miss Grantham was here, wouldn't you catch it; but don't you be afraid, I won't peach.'

'Was it very wrong to stay out with him?' said Maggie anxiously. 'I will not do so again,'—and she escaped to her own room, too happy at this renewal of the old easy, delightful intercourse to reason or resolve or torment herself.

Maggie was reading the morning paper to Mr Bolton the next

day when Trafford came in, and she thought he looked grave and preoccupied. After a few words of greeting she rose to leave the room. Trafford offered no opposition to her retreat, but rather facilitated it by opening the door.

'I suppose Mr Trafford has taken your place with the old gentleman,' said Mrs Berry, who, with a large apron over her neat morning dress, was making some pastry. 'If you don't mind, he will cut you out.'

Maggie sat down and laughed merrily at the idea of a rivalry between herself and Trafford for the possession of Mr Bolton's money.

'Oh, you think yourself very clever, I dare say, but I have seen a deal more of life than you have; and mark my words, that Trafford is no friend of yours. I suppose he'll be wanting some dinner by-and-by. What shall I give him; you know what he likes?'

'Indeed I do not. Send up some of your nice cutlets when Mr Bolton takes his luncheon, and ask if Mr Trafford will dine, and at what hour.'

'A late dinner! Lor', Maggie, don't put it into their heads. Perhaps the old gentleman may be wanting it regular after.'

'Oh, he must take his food as the doctors direct.'

Mrs Berry prattled on for awhile, till Maggie, finding a favourable opportunity, escaped to the parlour, and busied herself with her hostess's books.

After their early dinner, finding that Mr Bolton was still occupied with his visitor, she got her hat and a book, and telling Mrs Berry she would go to the seat on the crag to read awhile, she stole quietly away by the road, so as not to be perceived from the drawing-room windows.

'I am sure it does not do poor Mr Bolton much good, these London visitors; he hasn't eat two bites,' said Mrs Berry ruefully, as Maggie left the room. 'I am afraid your master is not quite so well to-day, Thomas,' she continued.

'Well, mum, he does seem a little flustered like, but Mr Trafford is sure to cheer him up. Dinner at six, if you please; and will you try and get some fish, and anything else nice and tasty you can think of?'

'Fish!' almost screamed Mrs Berry; 'why, it's half-past two now. I'll go and see about it at once.'

Meantime Maggie had sat for some time, alternately trying to

read and gazing out to sea dreamily. At length she closed her book, and, laying it aside, began to plan a letter to Miss Grantham. She must write and tell her of Mr Trafford's visit; and this was no trifling undertaking. It made her hot to think of it. She untied her hat and placed it on her knee. She had not sat long thus, a pretty little picture in her fresh black-and-white muslin dress, her scarf partly fallen off one shoulder, and her thoughtful face, with its earnest eyes and tender mouth, framed in a background of rock and wild flowers and trailing leaves, her hands resting on the brim of her hat—she had not sat long thus meditating, when Trafford joined her. She scarcely felt surprised, but she determined to leave him as soon as she could effect a retreat in good order.

'I rather think Bolton will not thank me for banishing you this whole morning; but I could not help it.'

'No, no! It must be delightful to him to have you here.' A long silence.

'What a charming nook this is. I suppose you often come here to read?'

'Not very often. It is an awkward place for Mr Bolton's chair. I only indulge in reading here when I have nothing else to do.'

No reply to this. A deep gravity, almost sternness, gathered over Mr Trafford's countenance.

'As you have finished your talk with Mr Bolton, I dare say he will be ready for the paper; I had better go to him.' She took up her hat.

'No, he is not, I assure you. He is gone out by this time. He does not want you; but I do. I have something to tell you! Something to ask you, and,' coming a little closer, and leaning his arm on the back of the seat, nearly over her shoulder, 'I dare say you know very well what it is.' His first slight hesitation had completely vanished by the time he reached this part of his speech.

Maggie was much impressed by the gravity of his manner; but his proposing for her was an event so far beyond the range of possibilities in her estimation, that she exclaimed, honestly enough, 'I do not, indeed!' raising her eyes to his as she spoke. Whatever it was she read there, she did not look up again.

'I always believe you,' he resumed; 'yet I have flattered myself there was such a thorough sympathy between us, that, whether acceptable or not, you must have known I love you—that I have loved you almost ever since I knew you.'

He spoke softly and very calmly; but Maggie could not reply. The astonishing confession, the terror of so much joy, struck her dumb.

'This is what I have to tell you. What I have to ask is, that you will love me?'

Maggie felt she must speak; she had turned quite pale, and now began nervously rolling up the long ends of ribbon that adorned her hat, with trembling hands.

'Every one will think you mad,' she exclaimed at last, the uppermost thought getting utterance somehow; 'there is no equality between us.'

'For God's sake,' said Trafford, with great earnestness, 'do not let any false pride stand between us. I have not acted with either sense or judgment; but now—let nothing separate us. My life is in your hands!'

'And mine in yours,' said Maggie; the supreme importance of the moment lifting her over smaller doubts and shyness. 'If you are not sure of your own courage and constancy, let what you have said be forgotten. Oh! look into your soul, and see if I am really worth to you all you imagine! I can bear a good deal; but not to lose you once!——' She stopped abruptly; the enthusiasm which had nerved her to speak so boldly dying out.

Trafford caught her hand in both of his. 'I am not quite unworthy of you, dearest,' he said, while his eyes lit up and a dark flush passed over his cheek. 'I know well how necessary you are to me. I have suffered enough from sacrificing natural instinct to conventionality. Then, Maggie, if you believe that I am true and loyal, you will not refuse to be my wife?' he pressed her hand almost painfully, and went on hastily, 'I must confess that I deeply, bitterly regret not having sought you in my comparative prosperity, as my heart prompted. Now I have but broken fortunes to offer you! I do not set myself up as a hero; I am a very fallible mortal. Will you take me with all my imperfections?'

'I understand,' said Maggie slowly, but leaving her hand in his. 'You did not think it possible to raise me to your own level before troubles came. Well, I am a fitter helpmate for a real worker than for a fine gentleman; but——'

'I acknowledge that you would have been braver and truer had you been in my place,' interrupted Trafford.

'No,' replied Maggie, looking down; 'I should then have been a man, and felt the force of more worldly motives.'

Trafford smiled, and ventured to kiss the hand he held so closely. Maggie withdrew it, as he continued:

'But, if you have even a little liking for me, grant me plenary absolution; besides, I must remind you that you never granted me a glimpse of anything like preference. At Grantham, I thought you were absolutely indifferent. Since that, I have imagined another had its share of your obstinate avoidance of me; but now—give me your hand again, give me your heart!'

'Ah!' said Maggie, her lips quivering, and great unshed tears brimming up in her eyes, as she gave it to him. 'I have tried so hard not to love you. Oh! how angry every one will be! Mr Bolton and Miss Grantham. What *will* Miss Grantham say?'

Unconsciously, she drew closer to him, and her hand pressed more tightly on his.

'Why think of them?' exclaimed Trafford; hitherto he had spoken with studied calmness, as if to disturb her as little as he could; but now he let the emotion he felt speak in his voice. 'Think of me; think of the happiness you give, my own darling!' clasping his arms round her, he at last sought the sweet, sad mouth, for which he had often pined, and pressed upon it a kiss so long, so tender, so impassioned, that Maggie felt as if her soul was drawn through her lips.

'I do think of you,' said she in a low, trembling voice, as he slowly released her. 'But I dread so much their anger for you. Mr Bolton! How shall I ever go in and speak to him? How will you tell him?'

Trafford smiled. 'I have told him that I was going to try my chance to-day, and that, if successful, all he had to do was to offer his congratulations to my intended.'

'You don't mean to say you have told him already?' said Maggie, turning pale. 'I shall dread to see him.'

'In short,' exclaimed Trafford, 'if you are going to make a bugbear of my friends and relations, the sooner we are married the better; and you must hear what I have to say on that subject this evening, or to-morrow morning. You are too frank and real to stand on punctilio, and, knowing me so well as you certainly do, it cannot be like beginning the great journey with a stranger.'

'No;' with a shy smile and bright glance up at him. 'A quiet real home with you, where I can be busy and of use, would be very sweet; but just now, I scarcely know whether I am terrified or happy.'

Here the tears overflowed their reservoirs so quickly, that she was obliged to cover her face in her handkerchief.

Trafford wisely refrained from indulging in another kiss, though strongly tempted. Maggie was so tremulous, so shaken, that he feared to agitate her more. Gradually he drew her into calmer conversation, and, with exquisite tact, assisted her to regain composure. It was very delicious to recall their first meetings and their delightful drive in Paris. 'You little knew how desperately inclined I was to run away with you that evening when we wandered by the lake.'

'It would not have been so easy to run away with me, against my will,' returned Maggie.

'And would it have been quite against your will?'

'Yes, certainly *then*. But it is frightfully late; we must go in, Mr Trafford.'

'Mr Trafford! What a little formalist! Do you mean to call me Mr Trafford all the days of your life?'

'I believe so. I have always thought of you as Mr Trafford.'

'But we have changed all that,' said he, rising and drawing her arm within his own.

To meet Mr Bolton with all her iniquity upon her head was a tremendous trial to Maggie, as Trafford, half-amused, half-sympathetic, observed. Having fully and completely made up his own mind as to what was best and pleasantest to do, he could not see the great importance Maggie attached to the opinions of other people.

'Well, my dear Sir, we have come to claim your congratulations,' he said, with enviable coolness, taking his *fiancée's* hand and laying it within that of the invalid.

'You have them,' said Mr Bolton, holding it kindly, though Maggie fancied there was a tinge of sadness in his tone, 'and I think there is that in both of you to make each other happy.'

'I hope you are not very angry,' faltered Maggie.

'Angry! No, my dear young lady, I have no right to be. I think you are both very excusable. Now you are probably not aware that it is six o'clock, and dinner is ready.'

'Certainly not!' cried Maggie, flying away, glad to be alone even for a few minutes.

Dinner was not nearly so painful as might have been expected. Trafford and Mr Bolton discussed law and politics, and even litera-

ture, with ease and apparent unconcern, while Mrs Berry, in the regions below, marvelled much at her young friend joining the gentlemen at their repast. She had merely said hastily that she would tell her all by-and-by, as they encountered in the hall. So Mrs Berry was obliged to wait.

'Depend upon it,' she said to Sarah, in the 'strong necessity' of speaking to some one, 'he has been and told that Trafford how he intends making her his heiress, and shut him up! I heard them speaking very low and earnest just after lunch, when I was putting a clean toilette cover on Mr Bolton's dressing-table; and that's the reason she's gone in to dinner.'

'Well, 'm, I was thinking as Mr Trafford was her young man.'

'Bless us and save us, Sarah, what put that in your head.'

But Mrs Berry's curiosity was not destined to be quickly allayed. After dinner Mr Bolton elected to sit at the open window, and Maggie, to avoid the pain and difficulty of talking, gladly read the neglected morning paper; while Trafford lounged in an easy-chair near her, in a state of tranquil enjoyment, not often or long to be enjoyed in this weary world. At last Mr Bolton said he was tired and would go to bed. Trafford assisted the excellent Thomas to wheel his master to his bed-room; returning, he found the lamp lit and Maggie drawing forth her work at the centre table.

Trafford stood for a moment or two on the hearth-rug.

'I suppose it is not absolutely necessary for me to say good-night just yet,' said he.

'Perhaps not,' said Maggie, shyly.

Trafford drew a chair to the table and, leaning his elbow on it, looked at the pretty, busy white hands, the tenderly-curved throat, the half-averted head, for a minute or two in expressive silence, while Maggie, in her quick-beating heart, felt how delightful yet how awful it was to be alone with him on such terms.

'Maggie,' he said at length, and his voice sounded like a caress, 'Maggie, what are you thinking of?'

'Oh, Miss Grantham! I can think of nothing else.'

She pushed away her work, and clasped her hands in a sort of despair.

'Flattering to me.'

'But can you wonder at it? She will think me treacherous—everything that is bad.'

'She shall not. I intend to see her myself on Tuesday, and to explain everything. I am fond of Margaret Grantham. Though

we may not see much of each other in future, I should not like you to lose her friendship.'

'Will it not be dreadful to have to tell her?'

'A little awkward to get into the subject, but easy enough after. Leave it all to me. Do not disturb the first happy hours I have known for more than twelve long months by conjuring up unpleasantness; let us talk of your relations. Shall I write and ask Uncle Grey for his blessing and consent?'

'Ah, yes! poor dear Uncle Grey! You are very good and kind.'

She stretched her hand out tenderly, and did not regain possession of it for a long time.

'You must go away then to-morrow!' she exclaimed at length, after some laughing conjectures as to what Aunt Grey and Aunt Torchester respectively would say, and the Earl, and especially Cousin John, and much loving talk that would scarce read sensible on paper.

'Yes, I must indeed. I suppose you would, on the whole, prefer my remaining here?'

'I perfectly dread being alone. I shall imagine all sorts of things.'

'I have no doubt of it; and, therefore, in writing to Uncle Grey, would it not be as well to mention that we hope to arrange everything, so as to be married about the twenty-first of next month?' and Trafford watched the effect of this *coup*.

'The twenty-first of next month,' repeated Maggie, opening her eyes in amazement. 'Why that is barely three weeks off!'

'Just so. Have you any reasonable reason against it? What is the use of prolonging an uncomfortable transition state, exposed to the heavy fire of remonstrances which you seem to anticipate? You will be your own sweet, frank self, and not raise unnecessary difficulties?'

'It is all so wonderful, so astonishing,' murmured Maggie; 'but nothing can be settled till you see Miss Grantham. Oh, do write and tell me all she says!'

'She shall write to you herself. Yes, she shall!' in reply to an incredulous shake of the head.

'And now, Mr Trafford—well—Geoffrey—you must go. Look, it is ten o'clock, and I have to see Mrs Berry yet.'

'Do, and tell her you have agreed to take me for better, for worse. This day's proceedings require explanation, so good-night, darling, and do not let any one or anything frighten or disturb you.

Remember you are promised and pledged to me,'—and Trafford drew her closely to him, and looked intently, almost sternly into her eyes—'I will hold you to it.' Then relaxing into a smile, as he met her half-wondering glance, 'I am quite capable of desperate deeds, though you may not think so! Another kiss, Maggie. I really am a model of moderation; we have been absolutely engaged for six or seven hours, and I have had but one! now, one more! Ah! little witch! why do I love you so much?'

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'I declare to goodness, Maggie, you could knock me down with a feather,' exclaimed Mrs Berry, sitting down suddenly as if unable to stand, about half an hour after Trafford had torn himself away, when Maggie had, with much circumlocution and many break downs, given her the startling intelligence that Trafford had proposed, had been accepted, and had made it all right with Mr Bolton, &c., &c., &c.

'What in the world will Miss Grantham say—and the Earl? My gracious, Maggie, you *have* fixed yourself on to some one! but if he has no money what are you to do?'

'I never thought of that. He knows best. I leave everything to him.'

'And how sly you have been! now tell the truth, didn't you know he was after you in Paris? Was that the reason you refused my lord? You would have been better off as the Countess of Torchester. And what's to become of poor Mr Bolton when you are off honeymooning?'

'Yes, dear Mrs Berry, something must be done for him.'

'Well to be sure, it's all like a book; and what shall we give them for dinner to-morrow? Oh, you leave it to me, do you? I daresay you are above dinners now; but mark me, if you want to keep a man sweet and civil, feed him! They are all alike. Lord, Maggie, you'll be first cousin to the Earl, and niece to my lady the Countess! People like them will never let a blood relation come to poverty. If ever a girl was born with a silver spoon in her mouth you are that girl!'

CHAPTER XL.

TRAFFORD had quite as much pluck as falls to the lot of most healthy Englishmen, and rather more strength of will than is possessed by the generality; nevertheless he could not help smiling to himself at his own embarrassment as he proceeded westwards to keep his appointment with Miss Grantham.

The young heiress had found a few lines from him on her arrival from Cowes, in which he merely said—'I shall call upon you to-morrow at eleven, if not forbidden. I am about to commit what my "friends and the public" will consider an act of imprudence, and as you are the most unworldly and imprudent of the family, I look for your countenance and support; you must therefore give me a few moments of your valuable time.'

To which, the first post brought him this curt reply.

'DEAR GEOFFREY,—At eleven. With pleasure.

'Yours, M. G.'

It is an awkward position, that of announcing your intended marriage with one woman, to another who has made you an offer and been rejected. But Trafford was resolved that Miss Grantham should learn the history of his relations with Maggie from his own lips, and before any other individual.

Miss Grantham received him in her private sitting-room, where the blazing July sun was toned down by rose-colour blinds, and the atmosphere was full of perfume from a profusion of flowers. All that taste and modern luxury could contribute of comfort and beauty was there assembled, yet the lovely possessor (and Trafford acknowledged to himself that she was lovely, as she received him with her usual graceful cordiality) had heavy eyes and an air of depression.

'Well, Geoffrey, so you have come to make your confession to me at last,' said she, as Trafford sat down on the ottoman beside her. 'Shall *I* tell you the heads of the discourse, and save you the trouble of trying to blush?'

'I should like to hear your version; but I have no intention of blushing, there is nothing to blush for.'

'In one sense, I am sure not. I only thought of your possible bashfulness. Well, Geoffrey, you have come to confide in me that you are in love with little Maggie, and intend to propose for her forthwith.'

'Margaret, you are positively uncanny,' exclaimed Trafford, in no small surprise. 'Has Maggie written to you?'

'Little traitress! no. Then you *have* absolutely proposed and been accepted? I thought there would be a little more time before us.'

'Why, my dear cousin? You are not going to declare against me? I have quite counted on you.'

'And you may, Geoff, dear old friend. Oh! it is a desperate act! But if you have asked her, and you are sure she loves you, there is no more to be said; still I will say that I am very, very sorry. As if it was not bad enough to lose your money and have to work for bare existence, you must hamper yourself with an incongruous engagement. You would do twice as well without it. It will be a millstone round your neck.'

'An engagement probably would; but I do not intend it to be one. I have nearly persuaded Maggie that our wisest plan would be to marry some time about the end of this month, and I look to *you* to complete her conviction.'

'Geoffrey, you are certainly the most audacious man living,' cried Miss Grantham, laughing. 'I know it is waste of words to talk to you against anything you have resolved upon: but how do you mean to get on? where do you mean to live? Oh, it is too dreadfully foolish altogether, and so out of place. Not that I mean to say a word against Maggie. She is a dear thing, but not a wife for you—no.' The tears sprung to Miss Grantham's eyes. 'She is a little traitress! To think of the many times we have talked about you, and she never for a moment admitted that you were in love with her. She always denied that you made love to her;' and Miss Grantham paced to and fro.

'She is no traitress, and I never did make love to her, at least, consciously, nor do I believe she ever admitted to herself that I loved her, though I suppose she must have felt I did. Tell me how you knew what my confession was to be?'

'I always had an instinctive feeling that Maggie was attractive to you. Something in your voice when you spoke to her'—Miss Grantham paused for a moment, and a contraction, as of pain,

passed over her brow as she noticed the tender dreamy far-off look that came into Trafford's eyes, the soft smile that stole over his lips, at her words, but he did not heed her—'was different from its usual tone,' she continued; 'but that day at the Beeches, wher Maggie came unexpectedly into the room, I saw it in your eyes The more I thought of it, the more convinced I felt that you loved her, and would marry her some day. Had you not made up your mind then?'

'I had,' he replied, '*if* I could get her consent.'

'Had you any great doubt about that?' asked Miss Grantham, elevating her eyebrows.

'Yes! great doubts. Now I will give you the whole history;' and he began by their meeting in Paris, which he accounted for by his attempt to rescue Torchester from the gambling set into which he had fallen; he described the sort of curious interest he took at first in Maggie because she was so different from the people about her, and then because of the blending of modesty and frankness, unselfishness and individuality, which characterised her. Her unembarrassed ease with himself, as though he were completely out of the category of possible lovers; the confidence that insensibly grew up between them; the tenderness called forth by her unprotected loveliness; the admiration excited by the innate bravery, the high spirit, sheathed in the velvet softness of her nature. In short, Trafford, in his every-day phraseology, gave a most interesting psychological sketch of the mutual attraction of two kindred spirits, but wisely left out of sight the wildfire which had soon, though he scarce knew when, begun to flash along the electric system of his frame at the touch of that quiet little orphan's hand, the glance of her calm sweet eyes. 'I only regret I did not ask her to be my wife long ago. It seems a shame to turn to her when I have nothing left. What a strong hold the habits and opinions of one's class have over us. At first I felt such a marriage would be disastrous and ridiculous, and then the first moment I lost my self-control, the instant I overstepped the boundary of quiet friendship—Maggie shrank so visibly, and avoided me so steadily, that I often thought she really did not care for me. And now there can be no doubt that our best course is to be married right off. Where could Maggie be during a long indefinite engagement? while I should be feverish and unsettled. Matrimony is not so very costly as we shall undertake it. I dare say Maggie will

not mind sharing my chambers for a year or two; at all events, I have made up my mind on the subject.'

'One word, Geoffrey! Did you know that she was at Grantham last winter when you came down with me?'

'No; but I confess your description of the new secretary roused my curiosity.'

'And you undertook the journey to satisfy it?'

'Not altogether. I was very pleased to be with you, Margaret.'

'Do not tell me such stories, you never thought about me,' interrupted Miss Grantham, petulantly. 'Then Maggie has been true always. Poor dear thing, she must have been unhappy often, and I have been so cross, Geoff! she shall marry you whenever you like. I'll write to her to-day and tell her so. I shall have no patience with her if she contradicts you, when you love her so dearly; and you do. You do not know how much you have let me see. But, Geoffrey, be constant, be kind! If hereafter you ever regret having made a foolish marriage—for it is a foolish marriage, and by-and-by, being a man, you may half resent the injury to your prospects and social standing—keep it to yourself, don't let her see it, for though I feel infinitely vexed that she ever came in your way, if I saw you change to her and break her heart, for it would break if she saw you changed, I would hate and despise you.'

'I think,' said Trafford, smiling well pleased, 'you may trust her with me, and I think if there were more Margaret Granthams in the world, it would be a different and a better place.'

'God knows! I am by no means sure. Now, Geoffrey, what do you want me to do? to tell Tor and his mother?'

'By no means. I shall tell every one who need be acquainted, myself; but you kindly proposed writing to Maggie yourself, if you will do this, it will be a favour to us both. She is awfully nervous at the idea of universal disapprobation. Then when the general howl begins, if you will strike in with a different key it will produce a great effect, but I really only care for your own fair self. If you stand by me the rest may go.'

'I will do that, Geoffrey. Are you going?'

'Yes I have troubled you long enough.'

'Oh no, no! yet you had better go. I have twenty things to do before that horrid fête!'

'What, the fête you came up on purpose for?'

'Yes, and I must go. I have such a lovely dress.

'Well, good-bye for the present.'

'Remember I shall go to your wedding, and bring Torchester with me,' cried the heiress, whose partisanship grew warmer each moment. 'Dear Geoffrey, how I hope you may be happy! this is good-bye indeed!' As he bent forward to kiss her brow, she burst into tears, threw herself for an instant into his arms, and ran quickly from the room.

There was no lovelier woman at the Marchioness of Hillshire's fête than Miss Grantham. Her cheek had a soft glow, her eyes a light and animation that gave her new beauty.

Sir Hugh Erskine pronounced her perfect, dazzling, and declared his mind to be made up that to-morrow he would secure this exquisite creature for himself.

When, a few days after, his departure for a lengthened visit to Palestine and the East was announced, to the delight of Lord Torchester and several others, society naturally concluded that he had been rejected.

It would swell the narrative of little things to portentous length were all the doubts and self-tormentings of poor Maggie related, during the day succeeding Trafford's departure. The greatest aggravation of her uneasiness arose from the downcast expression of Mr Bolton's face, and the depressed quiet of his manner. She felt a criminal of the deepest dye every time she looked at him. Mrs Berry, too, was a thorn in the flesh, with her perpetual 'wonderings' what this and that person would say, her conjectures, speculations, and congratulations.

Towards evening this condition of things as regarded Mr Bolton became so intolerable that Maggie could endure it no longer. 'It makes me miserable to see you look so sad, dear Mr Bolton,' she said, drawing a footstool beside his chair. 'I feel a sort of guilty creature to have caused you uneasiness, and to have made Mr Trafford care about me; but—but, I cannot help it.'

'No, no, of course not, my dear, and personally I highly approve his choice; it is only a little startling at first, and I was so in hopes he would think of nothing but his profession and making a place for himself!'

And do you think *I* would idle him, and hold him back in any way?' cried Maggie, much distressed. 'If you think it right and better for him, I am quite willing to give him up, and never see him again or—'

'My dear child, you could not! Mr Trafford's mind is thoroughly made up. Neither you nor I, nor any one else, will shake his purpose. He is no inexperienced boy like the Earl. I should never dream of opposing him. I am afraid I am unkind and inconsiderate to you, but we will all come right by-and-by; besides, you will be a terrible loss to me. You must allow for selfish regrets,' and he took her hand kindly.

'Ah!' said Maggie, pressing her cheek against the feeble hand that held hers, 'you must come and live near Mr Trafford and—and myself when things are settled—if such wonderful things can be settled—and then I can still be your daughter.'

'That would be a comfort,' sighed Mr Bolton.

'I will never leave you without finding some one to come in and read and write for you, while you are here,' continued Maggie; and then their talk flowed on kindly, though brokenly, and complete peace was established between them.

The next day brought Maggie an enchanting letter, tender, bright, and full of quiet humour shining through its deeper feeling. Of course it had to be replied to, and that was enough joy to have lit up a whole week. Gradually the astonishing fact that she was engaged to Trafford, and on the point of becoming his wife, grew delightfully familiar to Maggie's mind, and its more awful aspects disappeared. Then came a welcome epistle from dear Miss Grantham, beginning, 'So we are to be kinsfolk as well as acquaintance, dear Maggie,' and continuing in the kindest, frankest tone to describe her own preparation for the event, and her complete consent. 'You would laugh if you could have seen Torchester's mingled amazement and amusement. I cannot help imagining that on the whole he is highly delighted, though I cannot quite understand him. Of course it seems to him—as it would to any one—rather mad of Geoffrey to think of marrying *any* one just now; but he has always been so thoroughly independent, such a Mentor to Torchester and myself, that we would as soon think of dictating to majesty as advising him, and I trust in heaven all will go well and happily with you both. I must, however, admit that Lady Torchester is in a dreadful state of mind. She was here to day on her way to see Geoffrey to remonstrate with him. Much effect she will produce! But she may worry him. So I am quite of his opinion that the sooner you are married the better. Lady Torchester and every one else must then therefore ever hold their

peace; besides, I want to be at your wedding, and cannot postpone my departure for our cruise much longer.'

'Aunt Grey' wrote 'after her kind,' and Trafford was much pleased with Uncle Grey's kindly simple reply to his letter.

There is no more to tell. One chapter of a woman's life is finished, and into the deeper, sweeter, homelier mysteries and interests of the next, writers of English fiction seldom venture to extend their explorations—

'The reasoning of the strongest is always the best.'

Trafford had his way, and his very quiet, almost private, wedding, was performed in time to allow the happy couple to spend all the long vacation together at the 'leafy retreat' in Wales, as that gentleman had planned.

'I little thought when we met in Paris,' said the Earl to his cousin's bride, as he handed her into the Eastnor fly which was to convey them to the station, 'that the first kiss you were to bestow on me would be as Geoff Trafford's wife.'

'What a wonderful ending! How good you have always been to me, dear Lord Torchester.'

'Well, take care of Geoff, for he is a good fellow.'

'How awfully happy they are,' said the Earl enviously, with a look half comic, half wistful as he rejoined his cousin, whom he found alone in the little drawing-room.

'I wish, Margaret, we were going to follow suit.'

'Dear Torchester, don't talk nonsense to me now.'

'Not now! Well, when may I talk what you choose to call nonsense, eh, Margaret?'

'Oh, I don't know! When we are under blue skies in a southern climate, *perhaps*.'

THE END

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